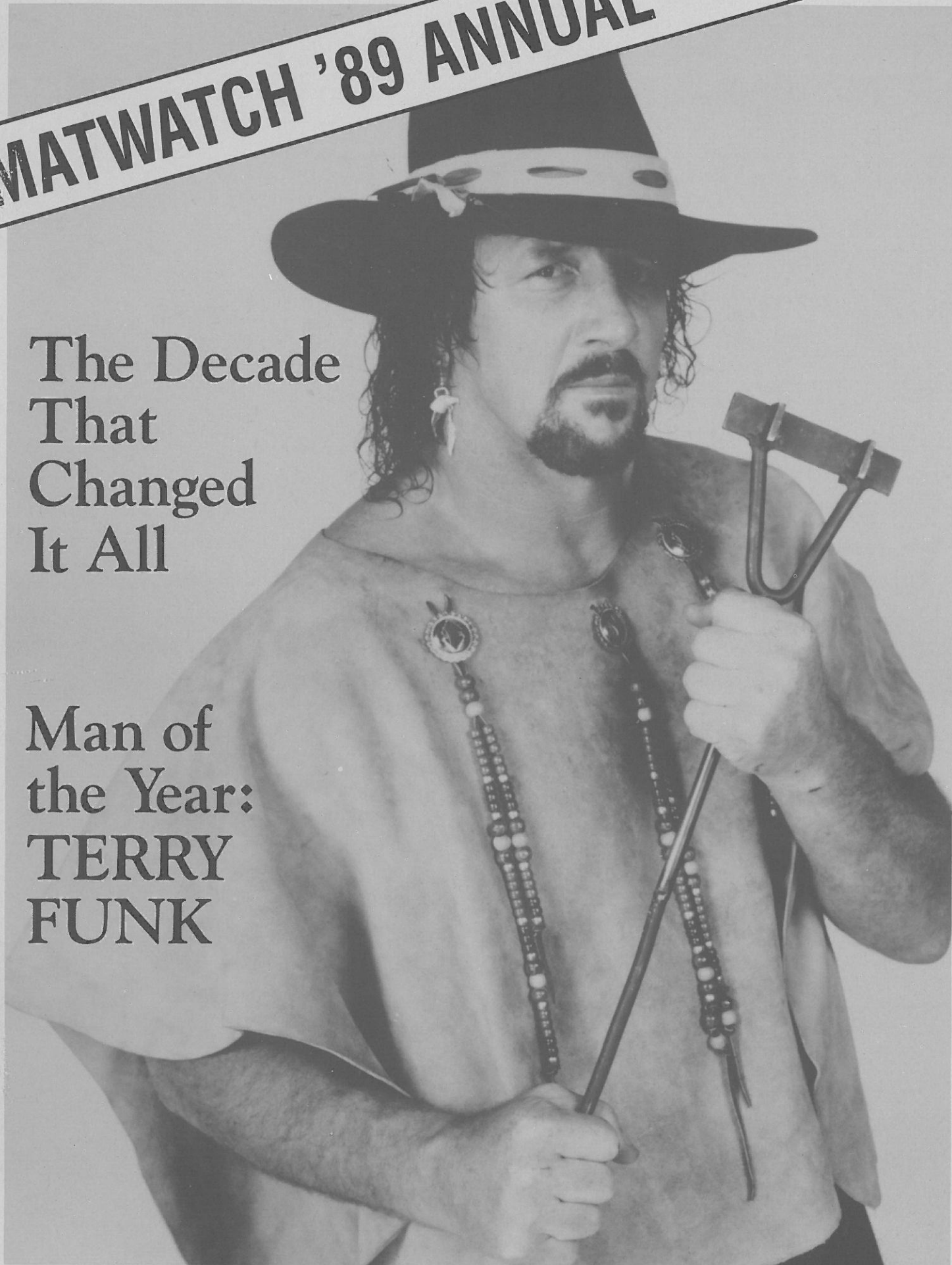


MATWATCH '89 ANNUAL

The Decade
That
Changed
It All

Man of
the Year:
**TERRY
FUNK**



MATWATCH 1989 ANNUAL:

THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL

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DEDICATION:**BILL (HAYSTACKS) CALHOUN****1934-1989**



When I first saw Haystacks Calhoun, he was ten years past his initiation as an "attraction" on the wrestling circuit. He was the wide forerunner of Andre the Giant but no less a quintessential drawing card until the mid-1970s. I saw him destroy the Assassins with his big splash, a move which earned him a place in the first TRIVIA ENCYCLOPEDIA. The above 1957 NBC photo is from Haystacks' appearance on Groucho Marx's YOU BET YOUR LIFE. He was the textbook wrestler-as-celebrity and until diabetes cost him a leg in the mid-1980s and ultimately his life in December 1989, the marquee 601-pound performer from Morgan's Corner, Ky., swung his lucky horseshoe to the delight of millions. Haystacks Calhoun is one of the reasons I follow professional wrestling today and the tragedy is that a younger generation viewing the pale imitations of Hillbilly Jim and Mighty Wilbur never saw the far more talented original. MATWATCH 1989 ANNUAL: THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL is dedicated to Bill (Haystacks) Calhoun as a fond but lasting farewell to one who brought me much joy.

MATWATCH 1989 ANNUAL:

THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL

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THE '80S: THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL

By STEVE BEVERLY
MATWATCH Editor



AUGUST 1958: CBS cancels the quiz show DOTTO. Little furor is attached to the move, other than DOTTO is the daytime TV's number one show and its removal is so fast, most viewers learn of it from announcer Ralph Paul's brief statement before its replacement show, TOP DOLLAR. The New York World-Telegram hints at possible "rigging" of the quiz but viewers pay little attention.

JANUARY 1989: World Wrestling Federation officials testify before a New Jersey legislative committee that WWF match outcomes are predetermined, in an effort to end governing commissions over the wrestling industry. Despite denials from rival alliances, THE NEW YORK TIMES and other newspapers trumpet the WWF's admissions. Wrestling fans across the U.S. seem not to notice. Or do they???

In his now-famous essay, "The ReDecade," television critic Tom Shales wrote: "You can't say, 'we're beyond that' because whatever 'that' is, it might well be brought back and made to work again. Which is what

happened with the wackiest recycle success in recent years: professional wrestling. One would think the audience had grown too sophisticated. But in the ReDecade, primitivism is only a channel away.

Whereas Shales and analysts like him have been intuitive as to the art of recombination---repackaging old entertainment forms to make them look new---I've never agreed with their idea of wrestling as a "recycle" success. Wrestling never really went away from its infancy in the toy store days of television. It simply was hiding in the same section as tomes in the "Regional" section of your local Waldenbooks.

But the 1980s in pro wrestling have more than reflected what happened with television in its excesses of the 1950s. Wrestling, Vince McMahon-style, has been the 1980s version of THE \$64,000 QUESTION, the archetype of TV's most explosive era in its fondness with big giveaways.

Until 1955, the quiz was a leftover from radio's innocent years when audience participants were asked questions far simpler than the

your average FINAL JEOPARDY teaser. If a jackpot ever hit \$100, contestants went scurrying for their nearest accountant.

All until a man who could be mistaken for a Korean War-era McMahon trumpeted the idea of taking an old radio show (TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT) and inflating its typical \$64 prize a thousandfold. But the wealth wasn't the only fillip here. Questions were sorted by an IBM computer, any query over the \$1,000 level would be under lock and key of two guards and a bank executive. Get to the \$8,000 plateau and your "average Joe" contestant is placed in an isolation booth heralded as "juke box baroque" and holds the audience in suspense weekly as to whether he'll return again to go double or nothing up to \$64,000.

Producers turned off air conditioners inside the booths to make challengers sweat over the big question. Answers to which the same producers had often fed players in advance to create TV excitement.

With today's lotteries, Publishers Clearinghouse sweepstakes, three decades of LET'S MAKE A DEAL and Bob Barker growing gray before our tube-weary eyes, THE \$64,000 QUESTION may sound hardly compelling. But it was the catalyst that mesmerized a nation for nearly four years of broadcast quizzes which headlines. It was not just the bigness of the jackpots; the trappings of the spectacle, the packaging of elements were what made a traditional format appear new.

I don't know if Vince McMahon Jr. had studied Louis G. Cowan's marketing strategies when he set about turning the world of pro wrestling upside down in 1984. But he did borrow liberally from Cowan's successes, along with some of entertainment's classic building blocks.

When Bill Paley set about building CBS into a radio ratings powerhouse,

he followed a philosophy that people listened to programs and performers, not specific networks. So he went about raiding NBC for Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, Bing Crosby, Red Skelton and Amos & Andy, among other powerhouse stars. Sound like Vince's 1983-84 raids of Hulk Hogan, Roddy Piper, Greg Valentine, Bob Orton Jr., Barry Windham, Mike Rotundo, Mean Gene Okerlund, i.e.? As far as McMahon was concerned, wrestling enthusiasts were far more loyal to specific talent, properly showcased, than to a time-honored name such as the National Wrestling Alliance.

Paley's overriding credo, one which CBS has departed from today, was to "build and nurture a roster of stars." McMahon has duplicated that track by presenting Hogan, Piper and company as celebrity/stars, rather than athletes---an element leaving more than one traditionalist promotion confounded in oceans of red ink.

In 1975, when---after 25-plus years of cellar-dwelling---Fred Silverman turned ABC into the number one network, he did so by whetting the viewing appetites of the nation's 10-to-18 year olds with early-evening comedies that reflected the daily comic strip characters (Fonzie, Laverne & Shirley, Bionic Woman, etc.) visa vis the issue-oriented comedies of the early '70s of Norman Lear. Add enough sexual innuendo ("Soap," ("Three's Company")) and ABC was in orbit. Everything from Hogan's living "Incredible Hulk" showcasing to the 2x4 gimmick of Jim Duggan to the lardbucket exaggerations of Dusty Rhodes to the double entendre of Rick Rude has followed Silverman's blueprint.

I could cite you a dozen other case studies which illustrate similarities to how McMahon borrowed from past entertainment successes and Osterized them into what literally

emerged in the 1980s as THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL.

That decade has been one a bit difficult for self-admitted purists such as yours truly to accept as making years before 1984 feel like "the good old days." But the McMahon years have written their own history as one of the great public relations and marketing tales of any era in any professional field.

From the more than 350,000 words written in past issues of MATWATCH, one no doubt surmises the McMahon style of presentation is not my preference within the genre of pro wrestling (pardon me, Vince, sports entertainment). I am still of the belief that a limit exists to the level consumers' creative expectations can be raised. And much as happens in the life of any television series, the day eventually comes when what seemed ripe and innovative deteriorates into an element of triteness. In pro wrestling, my feeling is that when that day does come, it could toll the final bell for the industry as we now know it---not just for the WWF but for all associations.

In a day when only Ted Turner appears to have the financing to remotely compete with McMahon (and the pitfalls of Turner's first year as a wrestling company owner create much doubt as to the direction of the National Wrestling Alliance), if the '80s were THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL, one cannot help but wonder if the '90s will be THE DECADE THAT FINISHES IT ALL? Extreme? Perhaps so---but the intense exposure and media scrutiny which appears to have wearied all but the most exorbitant appetites for arena matches may portend an eventual dramatic downswing in wrestling popularity until the next Cowan-Paley-Silverman-McMahon can be found to yet repackage a genre which has entertained television's minions since 1941.

The '80s were a decade with more public acknowledgements of wrestling's inside strategies nationally offered than at any time in its history. From Eddy Mansfield and Jim Wilson on ABC in 1985 to the McMahon revelations in 1989 and tacit admission late in the decade of creative manipulations by NWA officials, ratings on TV have continued high, if eroding---even as ticket sales dip. But factors related to constant TV exposure appear to be the culprit at the turnstile than doomsayers who proclaim "they've killed the business!" every time a new big-city newspaper "exposes" the ring.

Funny thing: through all the office turmoils of wrestling far more fascinating to follow than its arena storylines, I still love this genre. McMahon is fodder for college lectures on marketing techniques. The WWF-Jim Crockett wars of the mid-'80s have served as great media studies.

If a difference exists from those isolation booth days of the '50s with wrestling of the '80s, it's that contestants, producers and sponsors continued to live the myth of the big-money quiz until Congress and a New York grand jury forced them into admitting under oath the tensions of playing games on TV had no legitimate winners and losers. Even President Eisenhower called the scandal "a terrible thing to do to the American public." Pro wrestling? It's "work" is not viewed in most quarters as a "terrible thing," even under intense media scrutiny, because most of its contemporary fans have long since too sophisticated to live the myth.

THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL? Only the most dedicated purist still clings to belief that belts and outcomes mean more than showmanship and media positioning. And only the fickle quality of public taste will determine if the same legacy will be left for wrestling of the 1990s.

MATWATCH 1989
MAN OF THE YEAR:
TERRY FUNK



(EDITOR'S NOTE: Choosing a MAN OF THE YEAR for 1989 was as arguable as selecting a number one team in college football.

We looked seriously at Ricky Steamboat, whose re-entry into the NWA created a flurry of anticipation, along with seven months of impeccable wrestling quality, though his appeal as world champion never sustained.

Vince McMahon's merited consideration for increasing WWF dominance against the big purse of Turner Broadcasting, though this was not Titan Sports' most spectacular year.

At least six other personalities were seriously considered. But our choice epitomizes what we intend as the spirit behind the MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR Award. At 45, Terry Funk was an example to young wrestlers the likes of a master carpenter teaching his craft to an apprentice.

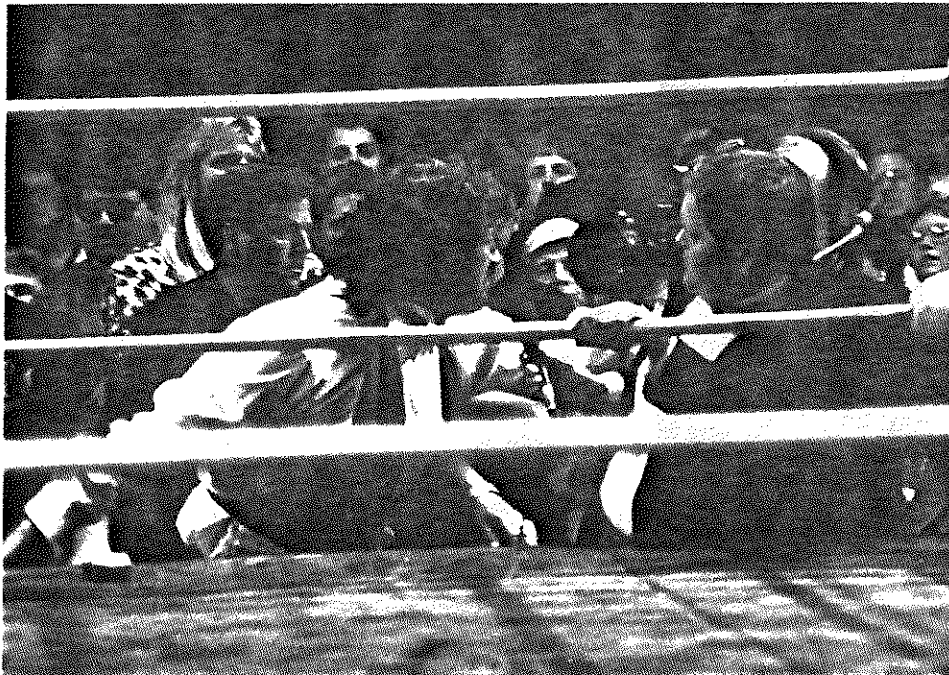
He was involved in an angle paramount to a change in direction in the NWA---and while the turn of Ric Flair to babyface

resulted in only a limited number of sellout houses (more a result of the long-term deteriorating business climate for WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING), Funk gave everything he was asked to give and worked as hard as any competitor could have at getting over Flair as a fan favorite.

Far beyond his involvement in the Flair transformation, Funk began the year with a mission and was willing to go to a minor league promotion to accomplish it. When he finally returned to the 1989 version of the NWA, Funk wrestled more than 30 nights with a chipped bone in his back and participated in angles on nights doctors ordered him not to compete. His interviews were among the most entertaining in the industry during 1989, including a classic two-minute segment to kick off his NWA return (see page).

Funk participated in what many MATWATCH reader Bob Gillespie has called "one of the greatest matches of the last 15 years"---ironically, like most of his NWA clashes, a loss: the now-classic I QUIT MATCH against Flair Nov. 15 on live national television at Troy, N.Y.

But above all, Terry Funk epitomized positive spirit in the twilight of a spectacular career which needed no icing. If Turner can put together a team of 20 wrestlers who can combine classic ring ability with the kind of entertainment values Funk is perceptive enough to offer, WCW may become a profitable contender in pro wrestling. To offer the kind of inspiration he provided to an industry rapidly eroding with cliches has been, inadequately expressed, refreshing. Accordingly, MATWATCH is proud to name Terry Funk its 1989 MAN OF THE YEAR. The following pages outline highlights of Funk's comeback year.



"YOU THINK I'M TOO OLD, TOO,
DON'T YOU, ROSS?"

Funk Accosts Jim Ross After Attacking Ric Flair in Nashville
(Photo by Steve Bryant)

Terry Funk had been as dormant as snow in Florida in impacting U.S. wrestling circles since briefly appearing in a Tampa angle involving his brother Dory against Mike Rotunda in the summer of 1987.

As January emerged, Funk was a few months shy of 45 and was considered washed up, to hear friends tell it, by most major American promoters and Shohei Baba, for whom Terry had been a mainstay for years in Japan. Pain and toll had been taken on repeatedly-damaged knees, along with a back which was one of the nation's top advertisements for Doan's Pills.

Occasionally, Funk's name would surface as making an appearance for an independent promoter, primarily in Texas or California. Predominantly, Funk was considered a "retired" wrestler, who genuinely wanted a new career as an actor. Yet, Terry's aspiration had stalled since a critically-acclaimed supporting role as the veterinarian/lariat expert Prometheus Jones on the short-lived ABC western WILDSIDE.

Funk's acting reputation always reverted to his film role opposite Sylvester Stallone in PARADISE ALLEY, an item a future competitor would refer to in a key angle.

But as 1989 began and with few studios calling, Funk began itching to prove one more time he still had it for the ring. Terry had earned monthly five-figure paychecks from Titan Sports during his mid-1980s wars with Hulk Hogan and Ted Turner's recent purchase of the NWA from Jim Crockett intrigued the ex-NWA world champion.

Barely tipping the scales at 218 pounds, Funk pitched entering the NWA as a junior heavyweight champion, a division which had floundered in the years Jim Crockett controlled the alliance's name. But in the early months of adjustment to a corporate owner and reorganization internally, Funk, nor a smaller weight class appeared to figure heavily in the new NWA's plans. So, if Turner officials wouldn't listen, Funk went to an alternate plan---one which, ironically, would involve the NWA's recently-deposed booker, Dusty Rhodes.

Rhodes had been banished from the top creative post of the NWA after a controversial angle with the Road Warriors on WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, in which Animal used a "spike" in an attempt to pluck out the eye of Rhodes.

"What has 4
teeth, 2 eyes,
no brains and
bad breath? A
Dusty Rhodes
fan."

---Terry Funk

Refusing to continue in a company he could not run, Rhodes was lured to Tampa to assume control of the faltering Florida Championship group, headed by Mike Graham, Steve Keirn and Gordon Solie. Dusty called to ask Funk to appear on his local "supercard," THE HOMECOMING, destined as Rhodes' monument to his own return to the Sunshine State circuit.

Terry jumped at the shot because it also meant polishing a "crazy old man" routine he felt would be a ticket into the NWA. Other than involving himself in a few angles, Funk did little wrestling on the local Tampa TV show.

Instead, Funk made his first appearance on the rechristened Professional Wrestling Association series with a segment called PROFESSOR FUNK'S FUNNIES. Employing the trademark Texas drawl for some of the most comical spots in years in a small promotion, Funk rarely failed to insult Rhodes. "What has 4 teeth, 2 eyes, no brains and bad breath? A Dusty Rhodes fan," was an early rejoinder. Yet, in today's love-the-heel climate, Terry found himself extending his popularity rather than generating fan anger.

His appearance at THE HOMECOMING March 11, clearly designed to get Rhodes' rookie son, Dustin, over, was

classic Funk. Arriving carrying a whip, Terry ripped up a poster held by a fan and promptly tossed the hapless customer into the ring and stomped him into submission.

Funk took as many bumps against young Dustin as Dick Van Dyke used to tripping over his footstool on his old TV series. Ending with a DQ loss when Terry used a chain on American Dream Jr., the stage was set for a feud with the Big Ball of Cholesterol, reminiscent of the late '70s Funk-Rhodes wars when Terry would chant, "Virgil, Virgil, Virgil.... how---are---you going to survive when all that fat-ty tis-sue curtles like oyster stew when you face a Funk?"

Beginning a buildup for a May 6 HOMECOMING II in Miami, PROF. FUNK'S FUNNIES took on macabre turns, the most memorable when Terry appeared with a chainsaw and cut off the arms and legs of a cardboard cutout of Rhodes. Another week, Funk was electronically transformed into a kind of Freddy Krueger character, which prompted Rhodes to remark: "You kids know Terry Funk doesn't really look like that. That's just tele-bision." Funk all the while kept up the insults: "Two things in this world are fat and ugly: Miami and Dusty Rhodes." Videotape traders began clamoring for the FWF show just to savor the Funk segs.

During mid-March, after an aborted attempt to stage a head-to-head pay-per-view show opposite the WWF's WRESTLEMANIA, Turner made plans for a live show on WTBS April 2. WCW executive vice president Jim Herd planned a weekend in New Orleans to honor as many former NWA world champions as would commit. At first, Funk balked at the offer, doggedly determined to prove he was still more than active and not on the Hall of Fame list with Lou Thesz, Gene Kiniski, brother Dory and Pat O'Connor, among others.

But Funk relented when promised he, along with Harley Race, would not be referred to as retired and offered a spot at the color mike with Jim Ross during the Ricky Steamboat-Ric Flair NWA world title rematch.

Ever the babyface, Funk won praise for his work with Ross and was invi-

ted back later in the month as a substitute color commentator with Bob Caudle on NWA PRO WRESTLING.

Negotiations began in earnest for Funk to enter the NWA as a major contender, building on his former years as world champion, and the character he had rekindled in Florida. An early stumbling block was money. "Terry wants an arm and a leg to come in," said one insider, "and some of the TBS people are asking if he's worth it." Salary figures have never been confirmed but were estimated in the \$250,000-300,000 range.

But the NWA needed a name wrestler to effect the turn of its venerable world champion, Ric Flair, to a babyface. Prior to February, a complicated scenario had been proposed involving Barry Windham, Steamboat and Flair, which would have seen Windham defeat Steamboat for the NWA belt in July and storylines which would subtly lead to a Flair turn by the following STARRCADE.

But with crowds languishing during the classic Flair-Steamboat series, TBS officials expedited plans for a Flair turn. Coupled with that, Windham was fired by TBS in March after allegedly initiating a power play against the company, killing one of the key elements in the plan.

WCW executives became convinced Funk could pull off the angle and were impressed by his contemporary views on the business. During the April RAGIN' CAJUN CLASH, Funk remarked he "couldn't wait to break away" from the seven other ex-champs gathered because of their constant harping on "how bad the business is."

Funk still had unfinished business in Florida, including an April 22 brawl on FWF television with Rhodes, which went all over the small studios of WEDU in Tampa. In the process, Terry signed an NWA contract with a May 7 start date, conveniently the same date as the Turner WRESTLE WAR '89 pay-per-view show in Nashville.

The night prior to Nashville, Funk carried Rhodes to the most brutal chain match brawl he'd had in years, called one of the few four-star matches Rhodes had wrestled in recent memory.

Funk arrived at the Hyatt-Regency in Nashville around noon May 7 and told fans it was a shame only 357 turned out for the Miami show, a key factor in Rhodes' decision to accept an offer from the WWF.

The setup for the afternoon's PPV headliner, a Flair defeat of Steamboat for a sixth NWA reign, had Funk joining O'Connor and Thesz as ring-side "judges," in case the match went to a one-hour draw. To heighten suspense, build time for the ensuing angle and give viewers time to drink in the impact of what would happen, the Steamboat-Flair clash was the sixth of eight matches on the show.

Funk had given polite babyface interviews on both the pay telecast and the NWA 900 telephone broadcast. During the world-title match, Funk and the other two former champs were shown marking scorecards. But after the Flair victory, Thesz and O'Connor proceeded back to the dressing room and Funk went into the ring, seemingly to congratulate Flair.

"I want to be the first to congratulate you, Ric," said Funk, "and I want to be the first to challenge you." Flair appeared not to take Funk seriously, saying he was "looking at the top 10," an elite list of NWA contenders devised by Ross.

"Are you saying you don't think I'm good enough, Ric, is that what you're saying?" Funk asked. Flair answered it was difficult to take anyone seriously who'd been "spending the last 10 years hanging around Sylvester Stallone and Hollywood."

After a few more minutes of verbal exchanges, Funk finally apologized to Flair and offered his hand. As Flair shook, Funk decked the champion and the 7,000 in the Nashville Auditorium screamed. In a seven-minute flurry reminiscent of a barroom scene from GUNSMOKE, Funk employed fists and feet and a now-famous table David Crockett had to rush into place while the in-ring discussion was underway. The scene of Funk piledriving Flair was replayed more on NWA wrestling in ensuing weeks than Doug Flutie's famous pass to beat Miami in 1984 was repeated on local sportscasts. Funk went after Ross, several fans and as

he made his way back to the dressing room, bashed 900 number commentator Joe Pedicino over the head three times, chortling, "You think I'm too old now? You think I'm too old?"

One of the funniest stories came from Thesz and O'Connor, who had not been clued into the angle. O'Connor said after the show, "Lou and I were casually walking back here and we look at the monitor. Terry's in the ring and all of a sudden, we looked at each other and said, 'Terry's actually getting involved in this thing.' We were shocked."

Another post-angle anecdote came from Funk's aftershow interview for the next week's syndicated shows. Terry's elongated drawl was amusing enough but when he offered the line, "Ric Flair comes to the ring like Barbara Bush with anorexia," half of the backstage onlookers broke up laughing to the consternation of sound engineers afraid Funk would lose a beautiful take.

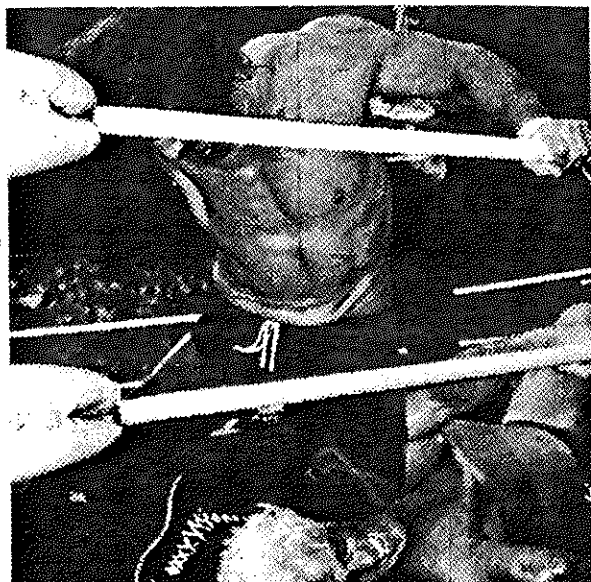
WCW president Jack Petrik made a calculated gamble, still being discussed today, to keep Flair inactive through the July GREAT AMERICAN BASH pay cablecast. Funk clearly had the promotion on his shoulders in the interim, despite a pending Lex Luger-Steamboat series which aborted on the verge of major interest when contract disputes split Steamboat from WCW after only seven months.

He pulled out every trick in his bag, including bringing on WCW a less-than-svelte promotion publicist Ron Ames in a blonde wig with a flowing robe as "Rick Flaire," an angle said not to have won great legit popularity with the champion.

Young manager Paul E. Dangerously, in an NWA MAIN EVENT segment which is said to have also angered Flair, rated Funk the greatest NWA champion of all time and Dory Funk Jr. second with Flair only third.

Funk was eased into TV work by destroying jobbers after offering them opportunities to get out of their matches with Terry. He'd beat the stew out of them even if they agreed not to wrestle him.

Eddy Guererro, Davey Rich and former NWA contender Brad Armstrong



**JACK BENNY WAS
ONLY 39**

"Old Man" Funk Applies Knee
(Pro Wrestling Digest)

were all brought in for one-night stands to do piledriver jobs for Funk. In the arenas, confusion reigned because Funk wasn't yet ranked in the NWA top ten and with his feud concentrating on Flair, publicly presumed to be "out of the business," difficulty came in shifting focus to a new opponent.

An early June brawl against Sting on NWA PRO WRESTLING should have opened one door for a major pre-Flair confrontation. But Sting allegedly refused to do a job for Funk in St. Louis and shortly after a WTBS CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS match against Steamboat, Terry chipped a bone in his back, apparently in Shreveport, La. He tried to compete for two nights but was in agony before a TV taping at Savannah, Ga., where Dangerously took him to a hospital.

Doctors wanted him to toss in the towel but Funk refused. Despite company orders to stay away from the ring, Funk missed no more than three dates, devising an angle where he would attack Sting with a branding iron during many of the pre-PPV BASH shows, less than satisfying for the legions of young Sting fans but an

inspiration to insider fans and company executives who marveled at Funk's stamina.

Funk was healthy enough to make the July 23 pay-per-view show in Baltimore and while the awaited brawl was not quite up to the level of the Flair-Steamboat classics, the bloody meeting and ensuing post-match brawl, involving Sting and Muta, brought WCW its largest live gate of 1989 and a profitable buy-rate from cable subscribers.

Late July and August saw Funk and Flair engage in bloodbaths around the circuit. Funk lost every time. At one point, he told a friend, "I'm the only main eventer in the country with a record of 11-107," his only wins coming against TV opponents.

But early September saw another of the Funk injury sagas written. During a mid-South tour, Funk had to be rushed to a hospital with a severely injured shoulder. Surgeons removed what was described as a "sack of poison" from infection of an injury Funk had left untreated. One doctor said had the surgery not been performed, Funk may have lost the arm.

Funk was forced to miss the CLASH VIII tag match, originally scheduled as Flair-Sting vs. Funk-Muta. But he recovered enough to attack Flair in the most hotly-debated angle of the year in pro wrestling, attempting to "smother" Flair with a plastic bag, which was a catalyst in TBS ordering a ban on blood and excessive violence in its matches. Funk, in his FUNK'S GRILL segment on the NWA POWER HOUR the next Friday, told children never to try such an action.

After an October 8 I QUIT match at the Omni in Atlanta ended inconclusively, a return match was scheduled for the Nov. 15 CLASH IX on TBS from Troy, N.Y. Days prior to the match, Flair-Funk sold out Springfield, Mo., and Amarillo, Tex., Amarillo fans believing it was their hometown boy's final match there.

The TBS match was one Funk's brother Dory did not want Terry to take, feeling the finish---in which Terry would give up---would tarnish an otherwise storied career. Despite the ending, Funk emerged with respect.

The innovative use of an in-ring microphone, coupled with the surprising enthusiasm of the predominantly RPI student crowd, produced one of the most punishing bouts in TV ring history. Midway through the affair when the crowd grew quiet to hear Funk ask Flair for a concession, one realized a classic was at hand.

After his loss, Funk shook Flair's hand and called the champion "a helluva man," before being decked by manager Gary Hart, an association many insider fans believe was a weak one during the Funk campaign.

A solid announcing job by Ross and Gordon Solie lifted Funk in the post-match wrapup to a level equivalent of the winning Flair, a point not unnoticed by Dory Funk Jr., who felt Terry's reputation was not damaged after viewing the match. A plan to have Funk's leg "broken" during the match was aborted, allowing an easier transition to Terry's new career.

Three weeks after the I QUIT match, Funk converted to the broadcast booth with new WORLD WIDE WRESTLING host Chris Cruise. Immediately, Funk put his acting skills to work, dubbing his cohort, "The Crispy Cruiser," and appearing to have genuine fun in his new role.

Viewers saw Terry offer a memorable GRILL segment after the CLASH, in which he appeared the remorseful loser, slowly warming to the fact that "Funk's Grill ought to be a place where you kick your shoes off and have a little fun."

Unlike some babyface turns, the new Funk persona still supports top heel contenders. He endorsed Lex Luger's chances during the recent STARRCADE buildup and maintains a no-tension relationship on-air with the recently re-heeled Jim Cornette.

Has Terry Funk wrestled his last match? His Amarillo fans apparently felt so by turning out in record numbers for his final Texas battle with Flair. But many close to Funk don't believe he's heard the bell ring for the final time; perhaps the prospect of assuming a role similar a role similar to the one Bill Watts played in his Mid-South/UWF days as the troubleshooter who comes back

once a year for a week or two to clean up a messy situation.

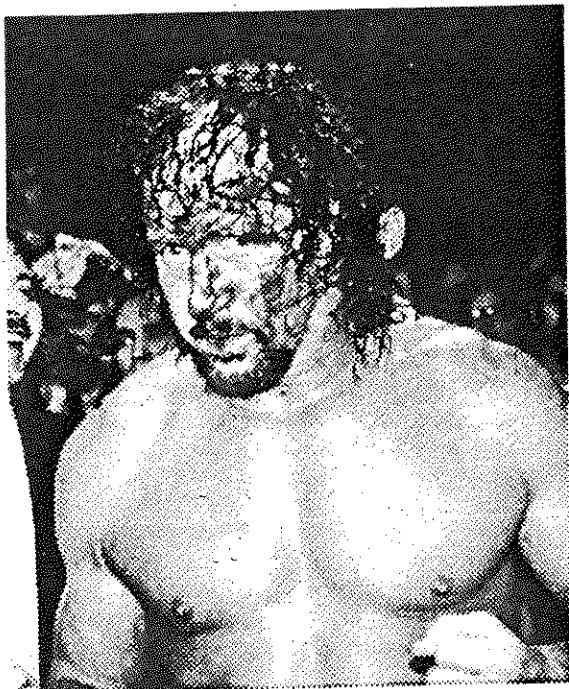
But momentum could be shifting to an even more influential role for Funk. TBS executives have been impressed with Terry's creative input into the group. Funk, as one has said, "knows you have to have sizzle today." Having worked the WWF in the early days of the McMahon Revolution, Funk realizes strong production values must be exercised in arena shows as well as TV productions.

Already, Funk has been named executive producer of WCW's syndicated programs, a move speculation is spreading may be a forerunner to a Funk-as-booker role for the NWA. Says one analyst close to Funk for years: "At first, I didn't think he wanted the responsibility and I was not sure his acting aspirations would not have prevented him from giving full commitment to it. Now, I think he sees it as a tremendous challenge and will go after it full force."

Of course, a full-tilt switch means TBS officials conceding a Flair bookership is unsuccessful. A switch to Funk could intensify what some insiders say is a tenuous personal relationship between the two NWA stars.

One who worked closely with Terry in 1989 predicts Funk booking could be the only salvation for a money-struggling NWA. "Guys would have more bumps and bruises than they'll have at any time in their careers. They'll work harder than they'll ever be asked to work," says the insider. "And they'll probably make more money than the NWA has made under Turner."

As a personal note, if you please, I remember days when wrestler Funk was losing duration bouts to Rocket Monroe on Florida TV, long before the "character" of Terry Funk matured. Watching him grow as a performer after he beat Jack Brisco for the NWA belt placed him in an ahead-of-his-time category for the Titan showcases of the '80s. But his personal determination and integrity in 1989 have inspired those who believe life declines after 40. Thankfully, Terry Funk felt he had something to prove in 1989. That proof is why he's the 1989 MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR.



Man of the Year

TRANSCRIPT OF
TERRY FUNK'S
MAY 13 NWA
TV INTERVIEW

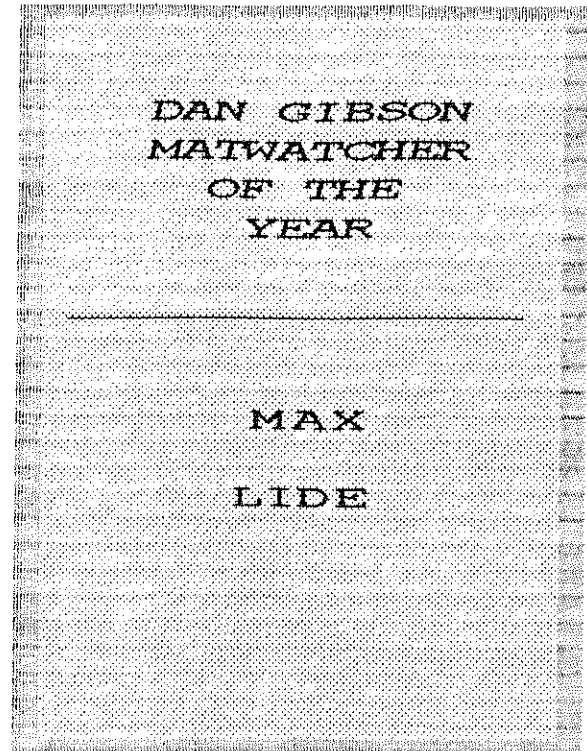
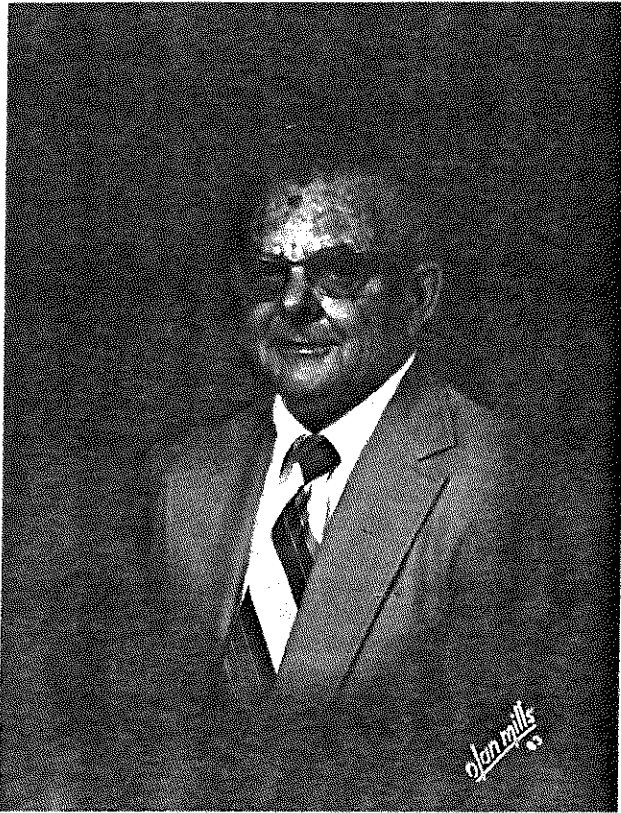
I want to talk to you simple-minded people out there.

Have you looked at the logo of the National Wrestling Alliance? It says, 'This is the NWA...WE WRESTLE!' Well, Terry Funk does not wrestle for the NWA. I do not wrestle for Mr. Jim Herd. Nor do I wrestle for Ted Turner. I wrestle for myself.

Now Ric Flair has the audacity to say, or to insinuate, that I am not good enough. I am not active enough. Well, look what happened to Ric Flair. Oh, I am so sorry...when I picked him up in that piledriver and drove his head into that table, I felt a very heavy crack...and I am sorry and I want to apologize for putting Ric Flair out of wrestling.

But you have to understand that Ric Flair comes to the ring like Barbara Bush with anorexia. Ric Flair comes to the ring with a banana nose, with horse teeth, dressed in...looking like Phyllis Diller in drag...is this what you want your children to look up to? Can't you realize that I---did---you---a favor???

JOHN WAYNE...where are you? AUDIE MURPHY...where are you? Where are all of our old heroes? Well, here I am....and glad to see you!



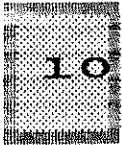
Max Lide has been Mr. Television of south Georgia for 40 years. A master radio and TV engineer, Max still owns the first color set ever delivered to Waycross, where he continues to run Precision Radio Service. It's one of the original RCA models with the old round screens. Not much was offered in color in 1950 but Max remembers how people would gather around his shop window on Tuesday nights to watch Milton Berle in color on NBC and some of the early Red Skelton comedy half-hours. And on Saturday nights, a glimpse of a program form still around today: wrestling.

Max once told me, "I don't know who sold more TV sets around here: Lucille Ball or wrestling." He remembers how the blue-collar set would huddle to see Gorgeous George, Yukon Eric and Argentina Apollo, among others. Max knew that if one of the fellows developed an intensity on Saturday night at the window, Monday morning, he'd probably be in the store to place an order for his first family set.

I first met Max Lide in 1961 and his infectious sense of humor has never left, even though he "retired" two years ago, only to be summoned back by too many customers who had faith only in him to fix their transistors. But I didn't know Max was a wrestling fan until about 1968 when, as a member of my local Methodist Youth Fellowship, Max and I began swapping stories about the previous day's matches during a Sunday night gathering at his home.

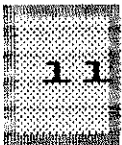
So Max became part of our contingent which frequently traveled to the Jacksonville Coliseum for a periodic Thursday night "fix." I was regularly as entertained by Max's comments as I was by the ring action. Tommy Tucker was for years the legendary ring announcer and radio personality in Jacksonville. Back in an early television repair class Max had taken in the fifties, Tucker came to speak to the group about the future of broadcasting. Tommy had an alter ego character named Junior Duck on his WJAX morning shift and on those many Thursdays, Max would first boo Tucker and then loudly question, "Hey, Tommy, where's Junior Duck?" Tucker would humorously feign irritation with our antics and Max would get his first good laugh of the night.

the NWA world title against Harley Race (wouldn't they have called it "A Race for the Gold" if Harley was going to win?). But the balance of the card, booked by Dory Funk Jr., also featuring a classic Ricky Steamboat-Jay Youngblood win over the Brisco Brothers to reclaim the NWA world tag belts and a brutal Roddy Piper-Greg Valentine dog collar match, is still regarded by hardcore fans as one of the finest one-night events ever and did prove a market existed for revenues beyond the walls of the arena, through closed-circuit TV.



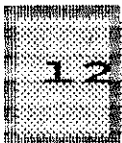
GORDON SOLIE: FIRED TWICE BY NWA

Now referred to on NWA/TBS broadcasts as "the legendary Gordon Solie," his two dismissals by Jim Crockett did as much to amplify the legend as his 37 years with CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING FROM FLORIDA and his 12-year stint as host of TBS' GEORGIA (WORLD) CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING. Solie, bounced from the key 6:05 p.m. TBS slot with the McMahon 1984 takeover, returned to the SuperStation July 28 of that year on the weaker Saturday morning CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING FROM GEORGIA. But nine months later when Crockett bought out Ole Anderson's dying Georgia-based group (see No. 11), Solie was bounced as abruptly from his customary emcee role as McMahon's WTBS takeover the year before. Crockett could not reach contract agreements with Solie and the cruelest cut came when the only mention of the venerable host came when Tully Blanchard said, "Tony Schiavone: the man picked to replace Gordon Solie." Two years later, when Crockett bought the Florida promotion, Solie stayed on board for five months but was fired again over another pay dispute. Spending two more years as co-host of PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK and anchor for several small TV promotions, Solie was vindicated in the eyes of many long-time fans when he was hired by TBS to host the Wrestling News Network on the new NWA POWER HOUR in 1989 and a bit of poignancy was added to the October 28, 1989 telecast of WCW when Solie returned for a week as host of the show, subbing for Jim Ross. All that was missing was his trademark, "So long from the great Peach State of Georgia."



JIM CROCKETT ON THE SUPERSTATION

The veteran Carolinas-Virginia promoter was the beneficiary of Vince McMahon's faux pas in pushing Ted Turner on control of advertising time on WTBS. When Turner ordered McMahon in April 1985 off the SuperStation, McMahon sold the remaining weeks of his contract to Crockett for a reported \$500,000 in a complex deal. At stake: four weekly hours of national cable exposure which, in effect, returned the NWA to the most desired time slots on cable television. As part of the deal, Crockett bought out Ole Anderson, who held onto a Saturday morning NWA-affiliated hour, and Bill Watts was forced off WTBS, despite having the top-ranked program on cable TV. Crockett's stint on TBS lasted 3 1/2 years until he was forced to sell his 53-year-old promotion to Turner in 1988.



SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT

NBC returned wrestling to network TV for the first time in 30 years in May 1985 for a series of successful 90-minute specials, now in their sixth year. The cards regularly outrated first-run episodes of SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE and offered lavish production values. On the premiere: Barry Windham, Mike Rotundo & Ricky Steamboat defeated The Iron Sheik, Nikolai Volkoff & George Steele; Hulk Hogan beat Bob Orton in a WWF title match; Junkyard Dog won over Pete Dougherty and Wendi Richter kept her WWF ladies title against Fabulous Moolah.

CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS ON TBS: FREE VS. PAY WARS

1.3

This cable counterpart to SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT had a different twist: the specials regularly ran 2 1/2 hours, the shows were all live and titles changed hands much more frequently. The premiere on March 27, 1988, was designed as a head-on basic cable challenge to the WWF's pay-per-view WRESTLEMANIA IV in response to Vince McMahon's direct challenge to Jim Crockett's BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE in January with the basic cable ROYAL RUMBLE. The first CLASH drew a 5.8 rating and 13 share, was seen by far more people than WM4 and a far greater creative success. The tenth CLASH special airs in February 1990 in prime time. On the premiere: Mike Rotunda d. Jimmy Garvin to retain his NWA TV title; the Midnight Express d. the Fantastics by DQ in a wild brawl of a U.S. tag title bout; Lex Luger & Barry Windham d. Tully Blanchard & Arn Anderson for the NWA world tag belts; Dusty Rhodes & the Road Warriors d. Ivan Koloff & the Powers of Pain in a wire fence match; and in the 1989 MATWATCH CABLE MATCH OF THE YEAR, Ric Flair and Sting battled to a 45-minute draw.

JIM CROCKETT BUYS BILL WATTS' UWF

1.4

The most quietly-kept negotiation of the '80s had to be the talks that led to Jim Crockett's \$3 million buyout of Bill Watts' Mid-South Sports, Inc., and Universal Wrestling Federation. On a stunning March 1987 Tuesday, the deal was announced which---on the surface---would put Crockett ahead of Vince McMahon in television outlets, the real reason for the buyout (until McMahon quickly moved to nose Crockett's newly-formed Wrestling Network out of 15 key outlets). Watts, though producing the most admired wrestling TV shows of the decade and building a network of more than 100 stations, including top independents and network affiliates in Los Angeles, Chicago and Detroit, had encountered financial problems. Crockett, who with his earlier buyout of Florida and tie-in to Bob Geigel's Central States group had access to more than 100 wrestlers, promised Watts the UWF and NWA would be maintained as separate, feuding promotions with an annual SUPER BOWL OF WRESTLING pay-cable special the week before football's SUPER BOWL. But early on, cracks developed. Ted DiBiase jumped from the UWF to the WWF two weeks after the Crockett takeover. Freebird Terry Gordy soon left. Gradually, NWA stars began dominating UWF TV shows. A final UWF TV taping in Cleveland in October virtually decimated the credibility of the old Watts group. By Thanksgiving, Terry Taylor's UWF TV belt melted in a unification loss to NWA champ Nikita Koloff. By January 1988, Steve Williams' UWF "world" title and the Shepherders' UWF tag belts went the way of far too many championships---they were merely and cruelly forgotten.

PRO WRESTLING U.S.A.: AN EGG

1.5

It had, on paper, the makings of a consortium which would slam dunk Vince McMahon with a full-court press. Seven major promoters uniting for PRO WRESTLING U.S.A., a syndicated TV wrestling package originated in 1985 by Chicago White Sox co-owner and former sports producer Eddie Einhorn, himself guru of an abortive national promotion effort (IWA) in the '70s, and AWA chief Verne Gagne. Both NWA and AWA world titles would be defended and fans would see performers from every key non-WWF territory. The series even landed (at a cost of \$400,000 a year) on New York's WPIX. But in less than a year, the package was torn apart by infighting between the various promoters over which wrestlers would be pushed. By 1986, PRO WRESTLING U.S.A. was an AWA-only showcase and quickly perished.

GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING GOES "WORLD"

16

By all rights, a change of a show's title is insignificant. But in the summer of 1982, GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, which Gordon Solie had hosted on WTBS for nine years, became WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, concurrent with the SuperStation's reaching 20 million cable homes and following Ted Turner's philosophy of fading away from a Peach State image. Accordingly, the Georgia NWA promotion began invading Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Texas and New Mexico, and state titles were abolished in favor of a National heavyweight champion (the first: Jack Brisco), National tag titles (originally won by the Freebirds) and the Georgia TV title evolved into the "world" television championship (most significant feud between Ronnie Garvin and Jake Roberts), a designation Dusty Rhodes ripped off two years later as NWA TV champion to give himself a "world" belt.

JERRY LAWLER-ANDY KAUFMANN FEUD; DAVID LETTERMAN'S EARLY FOILS

17

How much of Lawler's anger at the SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE comedian and TAXI regular was "worked" is still a matter only Lawler knows. But the Lawler-Kaufmann wars in 1982 stemmed from Kaufmann's wrestling women on SNL and in his nightclub act. Lawler felt the act a mockery of pro wrestling and came on the Letterman show, in its infancy days, to challenge Kaufmann. Their Memphis battles, one which resulted in Kaufmann wearing a neck brace from a Lawler piledriver, led to two additional LETTERMAN appearances, the latter of which saw Kaufmann toss hot coffee in Lawler's face. The angles made Lawler the first wrestler-as-celebrity of the decade.

TNT: WRESTLING'S TONIGHT SHOW

18

To be more accurate, it was more like wrestling's GONG SHOW, only Vince McMahon was closer to Pat Sajak than Johnny Carson. Beginning in April 1984 as a two-hour showcase of Tuesday Night Titans (hence the abbreviation) on USA Cable, TNT may have been the most bizarre hybrid of program forms ever on television but for two years, it worked. McMahon as Carson and Lord Alfred Hayes as Ed McMahon used the classic desk-and-sofa format to wraparound WWF matches and angles. A diet of TNT would include a visit to George Steele's psychiatrist; Jimmy Hart singing "Roll Over, Beethoven;" Terry Funk bashing Tony Garea in a saloon, leading to a barroom brawl; and Bobby Heenan taking McMahon on a tour of the "cave" where The Missing Link was "discovered." But the wildest skit came when Butcher Vachon was "married" in a ring and David Shultz started a brawl among the attendants and bodyslammed the "groom." The first year saw TNT frequently in the top 10 of cable but frequent time changes and a cut to one hour on the USA schedule, along with viewer weariness with the constant exaggerations, led to its cancellation in mid-1986.

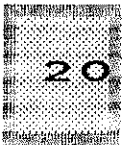
PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK: THE NEWS

19

Like TNT, this was an effort to package pro wrestling outside the classic match/interview/plug format. Only where TNT looked at wrestling with a wink, PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK took the ring seriously in a well-produced newsmagazine format. TV account executive and wrestling personality Joe Pedicino, who pioneered a party night seven-hour block format on WATL in Atlanta, created the series and hired

venerable Gordon Solie as co-anchor. Begun as a local 90-minute show in 1986 to review the week in wrestling (biggest coup in this version: an on-set interview with Paul Orndorff the week after his turn on Hulk Hogan), PWTW went into national syndication in a 60-minute format that fall. The Pedicino-Solie team meshed and PWTW was at its best in its first year when it drew from as many as 15 independent promotions, along with the WWF (except for a four-month period, Jim Crockett refused to share NWA clips). Most memorable angle: Paul E. Dangerously "buys controlling interest in PWTW" and "fires" Solie.

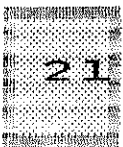
Behind the scenes, syndicator Bob Syres and ex-Global Wrestling originator Patrick Schaefer took over distribution of the show in 1988 and that, coupled with decreasing highlights and a miserable period with Schaefer as ineffective co-host, crippled PWTW. An effort to take PWTW on the road that summer diluted its immediacy and weakened its "news" format. But its top effort was in July 1988 in a tribute to Bruiser Brody where both faces and heels stepped out of character to remember Brody and Jerry Blackwell broke into tears. Pedicino's departure for the NWA in early 1989 triggered the end, though new co-host Boni Blackstone and wrestler John Michaels enceed its last 13 weeks.



DUSTY RHODES' NWA TELEVISION ERA

No more cussed or discussed stewardship of a wrestling organization's TV product in the 1980s surfaced than that of Dusty Rhodes' 1984-88 stint over Jim Crockett's NWA. Beginning as booker and TV producer for Crockett's syndicated shows in 1984, Rhodes recruited Magnum T.A., Tully Blanchard, Arn Anderson and the Rock & Roll Express, turned Wahoo McDaniel heel and immediately anointed himself and Manny Fernandez NWA world tag champions. Rhodes produced exciting TV his first two years and was responsible for the memorable Magnum-Blanchard I QUIT match at STARRCADE '85, the Sgt. Slaughter-Don Kernodle-Magnum vs. Koloffs/Khrusher Khrushchev "battle for the flag" in 1985, a 10-week Championship Challenge Series when Crockett took over the WTBS wrestling slots in '85 and the innovative WAR GAMES format for videocassette in 1987.

But in late 1985, Rhodes deteriorated into booking/TV practices which took nearly three years to cripple the NWA: scheduling all key angles and TV interviews around himself; making himself promotional star while weakening the strength of Ric Flair, NWA titleholder and far greater draw; altering TV into 30-second squash/90-second interview segments, based on the success of Magnum's repeated quick TV wins in 1985; forcing Flair into a gang, The Four Horsemen, and smearing Flair into a sex pervert image which hit bottom in a 1987 WTBS angle where Flair dressed a mannequin of "Precious" Garvin in black lingerie; creative pay-per-view bombs: STARRCADE '87 and the 1988 BUNKHOUSE STAMPEDE; and his undoing, a December 1988 "spike in the eye" angle involving the Road Warriors, which led to his dismissal. Ratings the last two years of the Rhodes TV era fell to a low mark of 1.9 in October 1988 and the MATWATCH-dubbed Big Ball of Cholesterol left the NWA after his firing as booker.



FLAIR-STEAMBOAT: THE SERIES

The return of Ricky Steamboat was the first keynote of the Ted Turner NWA era, kicked off with Steamboat (as a mystery partner for Eddie Gilbert) upsetting Ric Flair in a tag match (Barry Windham teaming with Flair) on the Jan. 21 edition of WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING on TBS. That launched a three-match pay-per-view and broadcast Flair-Steamboat series of NWA world title matches, highlighted by Steamboat's win at CHI-TOWN RUMBLE in February, regarded by some veteran observers as the greatest match in history. Steamboat followed with a 2-out-of-3 fall victory at TBS' CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS VI in New Orleans, in which

Flair submitted to a Steamboat chicken wing in the second fall. Flair regained the NWA belt in a 31-minute classic at Nashville on pay-cable May 7, in another match rated one of history's elite. Despite its superior ring work, the series never caught major fire in arenas---thanks to internal early promotion problems at TBS and the Steamboat "family unit" image not clicking with many rank-and-file wrestling fans who wanted a "monster" champion.



HULK HOGAN VS. RICHARD BELZER: SEE YOU IN COURT

Part of the 1985 hoopla for WRESTLEMANIA I which had a storyline unresolved until 1990. Fledgling comedian and Lifetime cable talk show host Richard Belzer, partially trying to expose Hulk Hogan and Mr. T, asked Hogan to apply a wrestling hold on him (Belzer). Hogan complied and then promptly dropped Belzer to the floor. The comedian suddenly found his forehead bleeding and was taken to a hospital for treatment. Belzer, who contended Hogan's and T's efforts to appeal to children were not sincere, sued Hogan, Mr. T, Vince McMahon and Titan Sports and won an undisclosed settlement in January 1990. Between Belzer and John Stossel, it was not a very good period in the courtroom for the WWF, though both actions reaped mounds of publicity for the promotion.



RODDY PIPER SAVES GORDON SOLIE FROM WCW ATTACK BY DON MURACO

Our list of 25, arguable at best, includes few individual matches or angles, emphasizing more face-changing trends and developments. But when veteran wrestling fans talk of memorable angles during the 1980s, this one habitually comes to mind. An impending Roddy Piper turn to babyface was set up on GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING by Gordon Solie's followup line to a Piper monologue: "So much potential...yet so much confusion."

Muraco came out the following week and began railing at Solie for not crediting the Magnificent One for career accomplishments, including being the first man to escape Jack Brisco's figure-4 leglock. At a point Solie was about to be creamed by Muraco, Piper---in full dress suit---jumped Muraco from behind and began a brawl requiring a major pullapart. The tension, creating a Shakespearean-like catharsis, came from the father figure and symbol of stability, Solie, being placed in a role uncomfortable for viewers and Piper's easing of that tension began a popular new image of "reverse obnoxiousness."



WORLD CLASS WRESTLING ENTERS NATIONAL SYNDICATION

In 1982, Fritz Von Erich's Dallas-based World Class Championship Wrestling, featuring Fritz's sons as stars, became the first promotion of the 1980s to attempt to "sell" its weekly program to markets outside its territorial base for cash. Trade magazines boasted of camera work bringing fans closer to action and World Class was the first to make extensive use of hand-held ringside cameras at angles atypical of most wrestling TV shows. High-quality production values, for its time, attracted a number of markets---including Boston and Chicago---and some observers predicted unlimited success for WCCW. However, Von Erich fell into a major contract dispute with Jim Crockett over the use of NWA champion Ric Flair and withdrew from the NWA in 1986, a move many observers feel started a WCCW downward spiral which forced Von Erich to sell the promotion to Jerry Jarrett in 1988.

LANCE RUSSELL LEAVES MEMPHIS TV

25

Details of this departure will be offered in more detail in the annual's TOP 10 TV NEWS STORIES OF 1989. But next to Gordon Solie, who had more national exposure, no announcer possessed a more loyal following to a specific territory of fans than Lance Russell from his years of calling the action for Memphis wrestling. His departure to fill an NWA vacancy left by the WWF raiding of Tony Schiavone in early 1989 ended an era of one of the most colorful emcees ever. One of his last major highlights in Memphis was the call of the final CWA wrestling sellout in the Mid-South Coliseum, Jerry Lawler's AWA world title victory over Curt Hennig in the spring of 1988, a match which was the lead story on all three Memphis television newscasts the same night. Russell had seen virtually every major performer of the last 30 years pass through the studios of two Memphis TV stations and not just coincidental with Lance's leaving was a dramatic drop in the ratings for the Saturday morning wrestling series on Memphis' WMC-TV, once hitting a peak of a phenomenal 80 share.

PEOPLE WHO CHANGED THE FACE OF TV WRESTLING IN THE DECADE OF THE '80S



VINCE McMAHON
JESSE VENTURA

The Archetype Face-Heel
Announce Team of the '80s



RANDY SAVAGE
LIZ POFFO
HULK HOGAN

The Ultimate Wrestling
TV Soap Opera Triangle

MORE PEOPLE WHO CHANGED THE FACE OF TV
WRESTLING DURING THE DECADE OF THE '80S

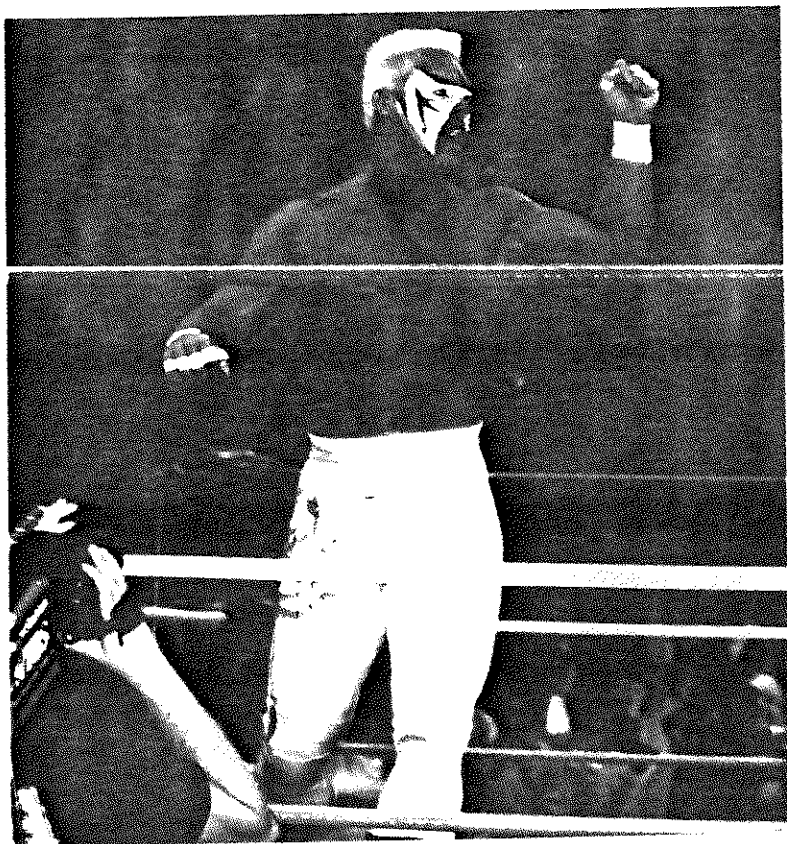


R.E. (TED) TURNER
Buyout Saved NWA



RIC FLAIR
Mr. Wrestling for
the 1980s

GORDON SOLIE
Mr. Television Until
the Mid-'80s



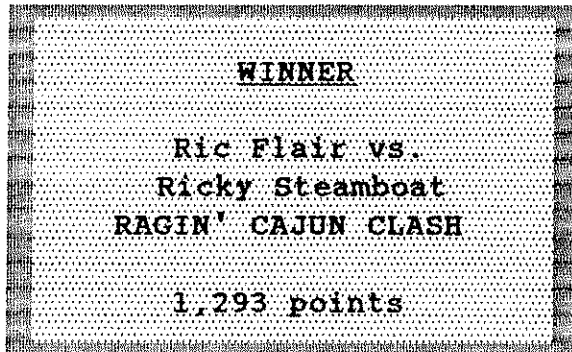
STING
Champion of the '90s?

His 1988 CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS
Match vs. Flair was the Most
Watched of the Decade on Cable
Television



Balloting was brisk for the second annual MATWATCH TV AWARDS with many of you offering interesting comments along the way. Voting was conducted on a 5-3-1 point system for your first, second and third place choices. In addition, three ballots were chosen in a drawing as winners of 7, 5 and 3-issue bonuses of MATWATCH. The top prize, a 7-issue bonus, goes to John Barone of Clementon NJ; the 5-issue winner is Bob Ivy of Starkville MS, my old home; and 3 additional issues go to Jeff Siegel of Evanston IL. To all who took the time to vote, our thanks. As a consolation prize, you receive Rice-a-Roni, the San Francisco Treat, and a home version of MATWATCH. Now to the 1989 MATWATCH TV AWARDS:

BEST BROADCAST/CABLE TV MATCH



2. ROCKERS VS. BRAINBUSTERS,
WWF/SNME, 348.

3. FLAIR VS. TERRY FUNK,
NWA/CLASH IX, 303.

The second TV match in the Flair-Steamboat series was a runaway choice in a match which saw an NWA world champion submit (Flair conceded to a Steamboat chicken wing in the second fall) for the first time in a title match since Gene Kiniski gave up to Dory Funk Jr.'s spinning toe hold in 1969. Cary Miller of Pine Bluff AR called it "the kind of match I remember from Brisco and Dory Funk."

The Rockers-Brainbusters Saturday night battle drew solid support for the well-worked event, though a much more distant second than last year's Midnight Express-Fantastics match finished as runner-up to Flair-Sting.

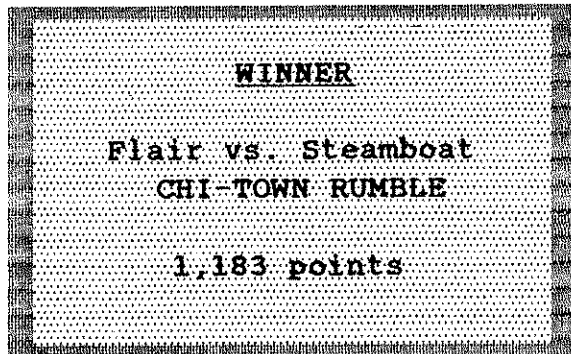
The biggest surprise was the write-in for Flair-Funk's I QUIT MATCH, called by Richard Frieze of Ashland KY "the greatest match I've seen in 15 years." The match occurred after ballots were printed.

OTHER VOTES: Flair-Windham vs. Gilbert-Steamboat, NWA (273), Flair-

Windham vs. Midnight Express, NWA CLASH IV (147), Funk-Steamboat, NWA CLASH VII (146), MARIETTA MASSACRE, NWA POWER HOUR (132), Hogan vs. Bossman, WWF/SNME (111), Freebirds-M Ex, NWA/WCW (63), Sting-Rotunda, NWA/WCW (63), Savage-Beefcake, WWF/SNME (39), Gilbert-Windham, NWA/WCW (30), Bret Hart-Curt Hennig, WWF/PTW (27), Owen Hart-Ted DiBiase, WWF/SNME (18), Sting-Bill Irwin, NWA/CLASH VI (3), Sting-Reed, NWA/NWA PRO (1), Flair-Muta, NWA/WCW (1), Lex Luger-Brian Pillman, NWA/W. WIDE (1).

1988 WINNER: Midnight Express vs. Fantastics, NWA WORLD WIDE (Category called BEST BROADCAST TV MATCH)

BEST PPV MATCH



2. FLAIR VS. STEAMBOAT, NWA WRESTLE WAR '89, 739.

3. LEX LUGER VS. BARRY WINDHAM, NWA CHI-TOWN RUMBLE, 168.

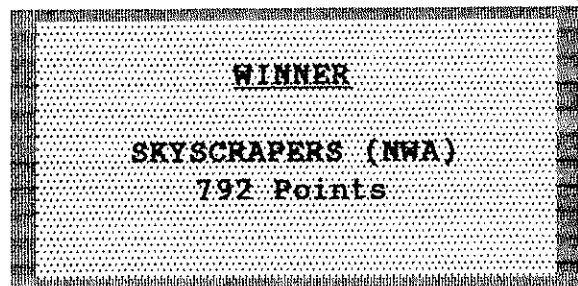
Great debate has ensued as to which Flair-Steamboat match was actually the best and supporters of each have strong arguments to back up their claims. But MATWATCH readers gave the nod to the CHI-TOWN RUMBLE confrontation where Steamboat won the belt amidst 24 two-counts and intense physical punishment. The WRESTLE WAR match was no less physical but slower developing in the first 10 minutes.

Lex Luger's defeat of Barry Windham at CHI-TOWN to regain the U.S. title took third in an affair which demonstrated Lex's ability to put together two straight strong pay showings and marked Barry's final NWA appearance.

OTHERS: Flair vs. Funk, NWA BASH (164), Flair vs. Luger, NWA STARRCADE '88 (114), Ultimate Warrior vs. Rick Rude, WWF SUMMER SLAM (114), Luger vs. Steamboat, BASH (113), Sting vs. Muta, BASH (99), Jerry Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich, SUPER CLASH III (93), Hogan vs. Savage, WWF WRESTLE-MANIA V (43), Luger vs. Michael Hayes, NWA WW'89 (40), Windham vs. Bam Bam Bigelow, STARRCADE (36), Rick Steiner vs. Mike Rotunda, STARRCADE (31 1/2), Luger vs. Brian Pillman, NWA HALLOWEEN HAVOC (5), Rockers/Tito Santana vs. Rick Martel/Rougeaus, WWF SUMMER SLAM (5), Rockers vs. Twin Towers, WM5 (3), Sting vs. Butch Reed, CHI-TOWN RUMBLE (1).

1988 WINNER: Flair vs. Sting, CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS I (Category called BEST CABLE OR PPV MATCH).

BEST NEW CHARACTER(S)



2. THEODORE R. LONG, NWA, 549.

3. CACTUS JACK MANSON, CWA/USWA, 338.

Ironically, for a promotion which boasts of more hardcore, high work-

rate fans, the Skyscrapers were Ted Turner's closest effort to a WWF-style portrayal. Led by the strong personality of Sid Vicious, the 'Scrapers were being billed as the next Road Warriors before Vicious punctured a lung in November. Whether replacement Mark Carswell can fill his shoes is debateable.

Their manager, former ref Theodore R. (Teddy) Long was aided in getting over by Jim Cornette's label of Long as "Peanuthead." Long appears a breakthrough for minorities but his late push was diluted by NWA bookers.

A bit of a surprise was the number three selection of Cactus Jack, who toiled in Memphis, Dallas and Alabama most of the year and failed to reach major national exposure until a move to the NWA in December. His career will be a key one to watch in 1990.

OTHERS: Robin Green/WOMAN, NWA (325), Beetlejuice, Portland (261), Widowmaker, WWF (160), Wildside, CWA (135), Norman, NWA (102), Zeus, WWF (75), Blackharts, Stampede (52), Ronald P. Gossett IV, CWA (48), Genius, WWF (5), The Model, WWF (5), Steelman, PWF (4), Wayne Bloom, AWA (3), Destruction Crew, AWA (3), Nitron, NWA (1), Sensational Sherri, WWF (1), N.Z. Militia, NWA (1).

1988 WINNER: Varsity Club, NWA.

BEST COMEDIAN

WINNER

JIM CORNETTE, NWA

585 Points

2. RICK STEINER, NWA, 516.

3. TERRY FUNK, PWF/NWA, 505.

For the second straight year, this was an NWA sweep with Funk supplanting Paul E. Dangerously, who finished fifth.

Cornette's margin, however, was much narrower than his better than 2-to-1 win in '88. Yet, he remained on top despite an eight-week hiatus when George Scott failed to renew his NWA contract. A key question for Corny is whether NWA fans will allow him to be the heel he is trying to revive.

Steiner made a serious challenge as his goofy character broadened with the courtship of Robin Green, which turned sour with Robin's evolution into WOMAN in the fall.

MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR Funk, through a series of hilarious sketches in Florida before his "simple-minded people" greetings became an NWA trademark, received more first-place votes (73 to 71) than Cornette.

At stake for the NWA in 1990 is Funk's ability, as producer, to turn NWA PRO and WORLD WIDE into fun shows with more comedy.

OTHERS: Bobby Heenan, WWF (318), Paul E. Dangerously, NWA (315), Roddy Piper, Portland/WWF (288), Jesse Ventura, WWF (255), Scotty the Body, Portland (207), Michael Hayes, NWA (78), Larry Cameron, Stampede (54), Ronald P. Gossett IV, CWA (42), Diamond Dallas Page, PWF/AWA (18), Bro. LUV, WWF (15), Johnny Valiant, AWA (3), N.Z. Militia, NWA (3), Stan Lane, NWA (1).

1988 WINNER: Jim Cornette, NWA.

BEST LIVE TV SUPERCARD

WINNER

BASH/GLORY DAYS, NWA

783 Points

2. CHI-TOWN RUMBLE, NWA, 667 1/2
3. WRESTLE WAR '89, NWA, 518.

Three strong singles events (Flair-Funk, Luger-Steamboat and Sting-Muta), a good comedy match (Cornette-Dangerously) and the first-ever pay-per-view WAR GAMES made the BASH special from Baltimore a major hit with MATWATCHers. The BASH show was probably tops in crowd enthusiasm, as well, drawing the NWA's biggest sellout of the year.

CHI-TOWN drew its strength from the blockbuster Flair-Steamboat and Luger-Windham affairs, though having to rally from a mediocre Michael Hayes-Russian Assassin and weak Sting-Butch Reed events.

Despite the Flair turn, Hayes' upset over Luger and two strong tag matches, WW'89 was likely hurt in voting by hardcore discontent with the Oak Ridge Boys' mid-show concert.

OTHERS: CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS VI, TBS/NWA (New Orleans), (250), STARRCADE '88, TBS/NWA (231), THE MAIN EVENT, NBC/WWF (150), SUMMER SLAM, WWF/PPV (105), CLASH IX (Troy, N.Y.), TBS/NWA (88 1/2), WRESTLEMANIA V, WWF/PPV (66), SURVIVOR SERIES '89, WWF/PPV (25), ROYAL RUMBLE, WWF/PPV (3).

1988 WINNER: CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS I (Greensboro), TBS/NWA.

BEST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

WINNER

Jim Ross, NWA

1,398 Points

2. TONY SCHIAVONE, NWA/WWF, 561.
3. LANCE RUSSELL, CWA/NWA, 409 1/2.

For the second consecutive year, Ross was the leader in points of all categories. His strong description of the Flair-Steamboat series and assuming the anchor role on TBS has cast him in a commanding position in the genre, despite criticism of his frequent double entendre remarks concerning Missy Hyatt ("What a pair!").

Schiavone climbed from fourth place last year and, ironically, his jump came by moving to announcing roles with less weekly exposure. But his presence in the top promotion and quality job on WWF WRESTLING CHALLENGE has won added respect from fans. Russell continues his consistent respect, though finishing a more distant third this year, after taking over a show (NWA PRO) less suited to his more active emcee talents.

OTHERS: Vince McMahon Jr., WWF (264), Gordon Solie, PWF/NWA (196 1/2), Don Coss, Portland (96), Charlie Platt, CWF (45), Chris Cruise, NWA (24), Lee Marshall, AWA (4), Marc Lowrance, USWA (3), Gorilla Monsoon, WWF (3), Dave Brown, CWA (2), Jim Davies, Stampede (1), Joe Pedicino, SCW (1).

1988 WINNER: Jim Ross, NWA.

BEST COLOR COMMENTATOR

WINNER

Jesse Ventura, WWF

1,101 Points

2. JIM CORNETTE, NWA, 738.
3. MICHAEL HAYES, NWA, 378.

Jesse was steady in 1989 despite one off show (ROYAL RUMBLE) and that's all he had to be with other promotions scrambling to find the right combinations. In fact, his blend with Tony Schiavone at SUMMER SLAM was one of the top WWF team efforts ever.

Cornette, assuming color status for POWER HOUR, has been the most visible of the NWA co-hosts and after a wordy effort at CLASH VIII, has better learned when to get in and out on the mike, as evidenced by his fine work at STARRCADE '89. Hayes was a popular choice to team with Jim Ross, based on their old UWF days, and Michael would likely have developed a major following, had TBS not determined his mike popularity diluted his heel status as a wrestler.

OTHERS: Scotty the Body, Portland (243), Bobby Heenan, WWF (117), Terry Funk, NWA (116), Paul E. Dangerously, NWA (72), Bob Caudle, NWA (66), Roddy Piper, Portland (60), Tom Prichard, CWF (20), Bulldog Bob Brown, Stampede (5), Kevin Sullivan, NWA (3), Alfred Hayes, WWF (3).

1989 WINNER: Jesse Ventura, WWF.

BEST WEEKLY TV SERIES

WINNER

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

735 Points

2. NWA POWER HOUR, TBS, 635.
3. SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING, WWF, 414.

In a dramatic reversal from 1988, when WCW slipped to fourth in popularity and was chosen WORST WEEKLY SERIES for the endless squash/interview segments during the final year of Dusty Rhodes, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING's move to a music hall and its format improvements, particularly in the spring, allowed it to regain the top spot among MATWATCHERS.

WWF SUPERSTARS, picked for the top last year, still maintained the most lavish production values of any show but bogged down into format predictability, despite new theme music and graphics in April and slipped to third. TBS' new entry, the NWA POWER HOUR, which gave Jim Cornette a co-host role, used editing better than any previous TBS effort and presented segments for Terry Funk and Gordon Solie, was a close runner-up.

OTHERS: Portland Wrestling (310), WWF Prime Time, USA (198), NWA Main Event, TBS (147), World Wide Wrestling, NWA (129), CWF Wrestling and NWA Pro Wrestling (45 each), USWA, CWA and Calgary Stampede (39 each), Wrestling Challenge, WWF (27), ICW (3), ACW (1), All-American, WWF (1).

1989 WINNER: Superstars of Wrestling, WWF.

BEST TV ANGLE

WINNER

Terry Funk attacks Ric
Flair, WRESTLE WAR '89
733 Points

2. FLAIR/STING vs. FUNK/MUTA post-match brawl, NWA BASH PPV, 315.

3. LEX LUGER turns on RICKY STEAMBOAT, NWA CLASH VIII, 311.

The long-delayed turn of Flair, with its spectacular performance by Funk, was almost a shoo-in for MATWATCHers, by the very nature of its anticipation. Probably only a turn to heel by Hulk Hogan could have topped it.

Surprisingly, the Randy Savage turn did not finish in the top three but Mike Williams of Camden NJ said: "I couldn't vote for it because Hogan and Liz were so bad, they ruined the overall effect." The aftermath of the BASH united the Flair-Sting team and was a potent brawl against Funk and Great Muta. But it was almost topped by the dramatic impact of Luger's turn on Steamboat after saving him from Funk's violence at Fort Bragg, which many felt was setting Lex on a course toward the NWA belt.

OTHERS: Hogan/Savage split, WWF (240), Teddy Long's fastcount on Road Warriors, NWA (150), Flair-Steamboat brawl, NWA CLASH V (126), Piper-Nord-Grappler brawl, Portland (122), Funk-Sting brawl, NWA PRO, and Piper transforms Art Barr into Beetlejuice, Portland (117 each), Marietta Massacre, NWA (84), "The Rod Awakening," WWF (67), Rude attacks Piper, WWF (55), Cornette turns on Dudes, NWA,

(51), Piper moons Rude, WWF (45), Missy Hyatt slaps Kevin Sullivan, NWA (40), Reverse angle on Flair-Steamboat, NWA (36), Breakup of British Bulldogs, Stampede (35), Bobby Heenan walks out on WRESTLING CHALLENGE, WWF (21), Steiner-Robin Green dates, NWA (20), Bravo/Tenta attack Ultimate Warrior, WWF (5), Nord-Grappler "Breakfast Club," Portland (5), Brawler-Terry Taylor on Prime Time, WWF (4), Funk-Flair plastic bag, NWA (3), Portland heel/face tag tourney (3), Nord-Grappler drown Brian Adams, Portland (3), Dennis Condrey turn, WWF (3), Entire Funk-Flair "I QUIT" match, NWA (3), Parking lot attack on Scott Steiner, NWA (1), Curt Hennig destroys WWF belt (1), Lex Luger roughs up Lee Scott, NWA (1).

1988 WINNER: Original Midnight Express attack Midnight Express, NWA.

BEST TV BRAWL

WINNER

FLAIR-STING vs. FUNK-MUTA,
NWA BASH/GLORY DAYS
969 Points

2. FLAIR VS. STEAMBOAT, NWA CLASH V, 381.

3. ROCKERS VS. TULLY BLANCHARD/ARN ANDERSON, WWF/SNME, 373.

The 11-minute melee at the BASH was regarded by many readers as the best TV brawl since Eddie Gilbert's famed BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS in the UWF in 1987. TBS even quoted MATWATCH's review of the brawl in its ad for the BASH videotape, which no doubt, helped to sell more tapes.

It was a narrow choice for runner-up and undoubtedly, since newsletter readers still tend to favor more of the NWA-style action, that probably steered the vote to the Flair-Steamboat war in Cleveland, which led to Flair being stripped to his shorts. However, the Rockers-Brainbusters confrontation, which actually could have been any of three explosions in syndication and on NBC, was among the best of this category the WWF has ever offered.

OTHERS: Piper-Nord-Grappler, Portland (265), Flair-Funk, NWA (150), Rhodes-Funk, WWF (133), Hayes-Luger, NWA (96), 3-WAY: Road Warriors/Tenryu-JYD/Sting/Hayes-Varsity Club/Sullivan, NWA (88), Entire I QUIT match, NWA (65), Warriors-Freebirds, NWA (48), Wildside-Rock & Roll Express, CWA (42), Condrey-Cooley, CWF (35), Adams-Chu'i, USWA (25), Ironteam brawl at CLASH IV, NWA (18), Funk-Sting on TBS, NWA (18), Piper-Rude, WWF (15), Rockers-Rougeaus, WWF (15), Sting-Muta on TBS, NWA (15), Luger-Pillman, NWA (3), Embry-Chu'i, USWA (3), Kerry Von Erich-Botswana Beast, USWA (1), Sky-scrapers-Warriors, NWA (1), Steiners vs. Sullivan-Rotunda, NWA (1).

1988 WINNER: MIDNIGHT EXPRESS vs. FANTASTICS, NWA CLASH I.

MEMORABLE TV MOMENT

WINNER

Funk turns on Flair, NWA

714 Points

2. HULK HOGAN blows cue at NBC MAIN EVENT, WWF, 282.

3. TEDDY LONG fastcounts ROAD WARRIORS at CLASH VI, NWA, and Babyface cheer for FREEBIRDS at HALLOWEEN HAVOC (tie), 160.

The Funk-Flair saga has been well-documented but if it's true that people have a better recall of bad things, Hulk Hogan embodied that at the NBC MAIN EVENT in February when he asked for a cue from a floor director after a station break, then abruptly reverted to grieving over the injured Liz Poffo. Hogan and Liz could have co-won worst actor awards.

For years, people said the Road Warriors could never gain the NWA world tag belts because they "wouldn't lose." They did win them and the Teddy Long quick count, which also served as his turn from ref to heel manager, was the most effective way to get the belts out of Hawk and Animal at the CLASH match vs. Steve Williams and Mike Rotunda. But many readers were equally as stunned at the overwhelming popular cheers for Hayes & Jimmy Garvin at the Philly HAVOC PPV, where they had unrivaled support against the Dynamic Dudes.

OTHERS: Terry Funk's Flair-as-Barbara Bush interview, NWA (150), Flair stripped to shorts, NWA (135), Tommy Young raising Steamboat's hand in victory at CHI-TOWN, NWA (111), Liz Poffo bashes Sherri Martel at SUMMER SLAM, WWF (90), Dusty Rhodes "spike in the eye," NWA (81), Robin Smith singing at WM5, WWF (15), Terry Funk introduces "Rick Flaire," NWA (14), Heels attack Don Coss, Portland (11), Cornette bashes Dudes at HAVOC, NWA (10), Flair kisses wife before CHI-TOWN, NWA (7), Steiner dates, NWA; Liz's bump at MAIN EVENT, WWF (6 each), Dusty's hand in toilet, WWF; Scotty the Body intros Soul Patrol, Portland; Hogan kickout of Savage pin try on one at WM5, WWF; Scott Peterson turn, Portland; Gene Okerlund's profanity at SUMMER SLAM,

WWF; Bruno/Flair/Funk in same ring at HAVOC, NWA; Ronald P. Gossett's revenge on faces, CWA; Ed Whalen explaining Bulldogs' breakup, Stampede; Hogan's role in Savage turn, WWF (all 5 each), Hogan small package win over Ted DiBiase, WWF (4), Original Freebird music at WW'89, NWA; Percy Pringle bloodbath, USWA; Funk going on table at "I QUIT" match, NWA; Carl Stiles giving Ginger a pig, Portland; Steamboat wins NWA title, NWA; Paul E. Dangerously in BVDs at BASH, NWA; Eric Embry, Pringle take down WCCW banner, USWA; Jim Ross/Rick Steiner eyes pop at WOMAN, NWA; Grappler puts mist pellet in mouth, Portland; Sting wins TV title, NWA; Hogan superplex on Bossman, WWF; Paul E. clobbers Corny w. tennis racket, NWA (3 each), Parking lot attack on Scott Steiner, NWA; George Steinbrenner giving Bobby Heenan advice, WWF; Gossett as "The Joker," CWA; Portland heels bully Billy Jack Haynes' father, Portland; Scotty's pre-match dancing, Portland; Hogan "saving Liz's life," WWF; Dusty's "doodoo" line, WWF; Jerry Lawler blasts Verne Gagne, WWF.

1988 WINNER: TWIN DAVE HEBNER
REFEREES at NBC MAIN EVENT, WWF.

BEST SINGLE TV PERFORMANCE

WINNER

TERRY FUNK, "The Turn of
Ric Flair," NWA
702 Points

2. JIM ROSS/RICK STEINER, "The Transformation of Robin Green," NWA, 512.

3. JIM ROSS, Play-by-play of FLAIR-STEAMBOAT at CHI-TOWN RUMBLE, 450.

With so much surrounding the Flair turn capturing MATWATCHers' attention, the performance of Funk was a standout of this or any year. MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR Funk tried to beat up Ross and Joe Pedicino during the aftermath of his injuring Flair and had the Nashville heat offsetting the 30-degree weather outside.

The Ross/Steiner efforts in preparation for Rick's night date with Robin Green should merit an award for WCW production chief Keith Mitchell for a first-class editing job, climaxed by those memorable bulging eyes of Jim & Rick. The announcing of Ross, in its intensity and in the background information on the Flair-Steamboat history will go down as one of wrestling's great all-time mike performances.

OTHERS: Randy Savage, pre-WRESTLEMANIA interviews, WWF (445), Paul E. Dangerously, final DANGER ZONE, NWA (250), Roddy Piper, "School Bus Monologue," Prime Time Wrestling, WWF (141), Bobby Heenan, "Walkout on Wrestling Challenge," WWF (81), Terry Funk, "I QUIT Match," NWA (25), Jim Cornette, "The Turn of the M Ex," NWA (6), Scotty the Body, "The Turn of Scott Peterson," Portland (5), Funk, post I QUIT "Funk's Grill," NWA; Rick Rude & Roddy Piper, "Showdown on PTW," WWF; and Kevin Sullivan, color commentary with Lance Russell, NWA (3 each); Lex Luger, "Wrecking Trophies," NWA; Lanny Poffo, Genius segments, WWF; Luger, for "shoot" interviews, NWA; Ronald P. Gossett IV, "The Promoter," CWA; Road Warriors, post-Spike in eye interview, NWA; and Cornette, "Why the Midnight Express Is Leaving the NWA," NWA (all 1 each).

1988 WINNER: Award not created.

BEST TV TURN

WINNER

Lex Luger, NWA

815 Points

2. Randy Savage, WWF, 696.

3. Ric Flair, NWA, 630.

It may be incongruous that Flair's turn drew most of the attention, yet it finished third in "Best Turn," but the reaction from MATWATCHers indicates that while the turn was spectacularly handled by Funk, it wasn't the most effective for Flair.

The Luger turn appears to have had more impact because it fits Lex's natural personality. "When he lowered that clothesline on Ricky Steamboat, it was as if he had a big load lifted from him," said Charlie Connors of Cleveland.

The Savage turn couldn't help but get a big vote because most WWF fans enjoyed Randy immensely in his original heel persona, plus many newsletter readers enjoyed seeing Hogan get bashed. The vote for the Cornette/Midnights heel turn was significant, coming as late in the year as it did.

OTHERS: Cornette/Midnights, NWA (382 1/2), Michael Hayes, NWA (160 1/2), Terry Taylor, WWF (81), Scott Peterson, Portland (45), WOMAN, NWA (18), Dennis Condrey, CWF, and Diamond Dallas Page, PWF (3 each), Rick Martel, WWF, Terry Funk, NWA, Paul Diamond, AWA, John Nord, Portland, and Brian Lee, CWA (1 each).

1988 WINNER: Barry Windham, NWA.

RIISING STAR OF THE YEAR

WINNER

Scott Steiner, NWA

922 1/2 Points

2. GREAT MUTA, NWA, 578.

3. BRIAN PILLMAN, NWA, 390.

For a group looking at the end of the year more like déjà vu of the mid-'80s, the NWA brought on three of the best new stars in the spring with the Steiner-Muta-Pillman combo.

Scott Steiner was a mid-level babyface for the CWA in February when he came to ringside with Rick for his TV title bout at CHI-TOWN RUMBLE. But his Frankenstein is one of the most impressive new maneuvers in the game and Scott is being talked of in future world title terms.

Muta, though bogged down in tag angles with Buzz Sawyer and Kendo Nagasaki late in the year, shows potential as one of the most physical performers of the '90s and has a great future as a fan favorite. Pillman has can't miss written on him if he avoids injury and can begin to get major wins in 1990.

OTHERS: Scotty the Body, Portland (211 1/2), Cactus Jack Manson, USWA/CWF/NWA (100), Tony Schiavone, WWF (57), Sid Vicious, NWA (54), Larry Cameron, Stampede (42), Brian Lee, USWA (25), Destruction Crew, AWA (18) Mr. Perfect, WWF (5), Lex Luger, NWA (5), Zeus, WWF (4), Wayne Bloom, AWA, Derrick Dukes, AWA, and Pete Montana, Stampede (1 each).

1988 WINNER: Rick Steiner, NWA.

OUTSTANDING TV PERSONALITY

WINNER

Terry Funk, NWA

618 Points

2. Jim Cornette, NWA, 585 1/2.
3. Ric Flair, NWA, 303.

Despite having solid, strong support, perhaps his two-month absence and apparent weakening of the Midnight Express act led to Jim Cornette being upset in this category.

Terry Funk, whose exploits have dominated the BEST OF... categories as Michael Jackson once did at the Grammys, nosed out Corny for the OUTSTANDING TV PERSONALITY.

Cornette will have a strong base to build on in 1990 if his LOUISVILLE SLUGGER segment on WCW casts him more in the role of inquiring journalist. NWA fans are not likely to allow him to play the heavy heel of his pre-1988 days, so look for more of the soft heel, comic insult variety from Cornette in the coming year.

Flair, who as a babyface rarely reverted to the sincere, straight-talking interview his core Crockett fans remember from the early 1980s, finished third again but faces an uphill battle regaining the top 3 next year, particularly if he drops the world belt Feb. 25.

Among the honorable mentions, had Roddy Piper been in the WWF more than the final third of the year, he likely would have nosed into the big three. However, he could be hurt in 1990 by not being part of the PRIME TIME anchor team. Jim Ross rounded

out the top five, making a strong impact for a non-wrestler.

OTHERS: Roddy Piper, WWF (292 1/2), Jim Ross, NWA (288 1/2), Paul E. Dangerously, NWA (177), Rick Steiner, NWA (168), Bobby Heenan, WWF (151 1/2), Jesse Ventura, WWF (144), Scotty the Body, Portland (143), Randy Savage, WWF (103 1/2), Michael Hayes, NWA (36), Jerry Lawler, CWA/USWA (33), Sherri Martel, WWF (6), Hulk Hogan, WWF (5), Sting, NWA (5), Tom Prichard, CWF (4), Gordon Solie, NWA/PWF (3), Brother LUV, WWF (1), Percy Pringle, USWA (1), Grappler, Portland (1), Charlie Platt, CWF (1).

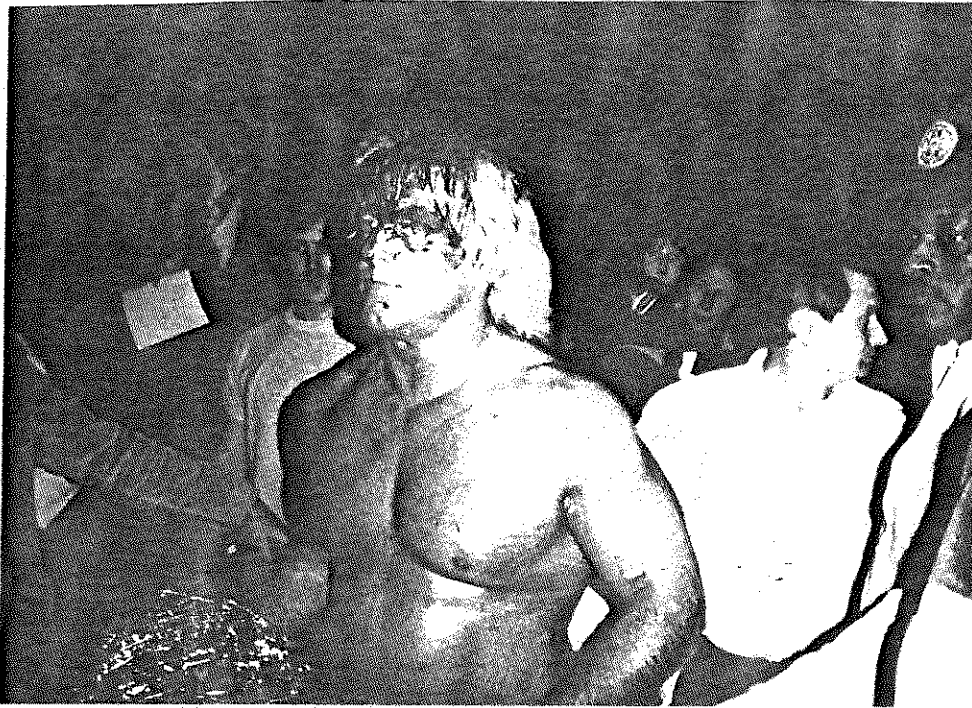
1988 WINNER: Jim Cornette, NWA.



TOP TV PERSONALITY

Terry Funk By a Nose
(Photo: Dennis Brent)

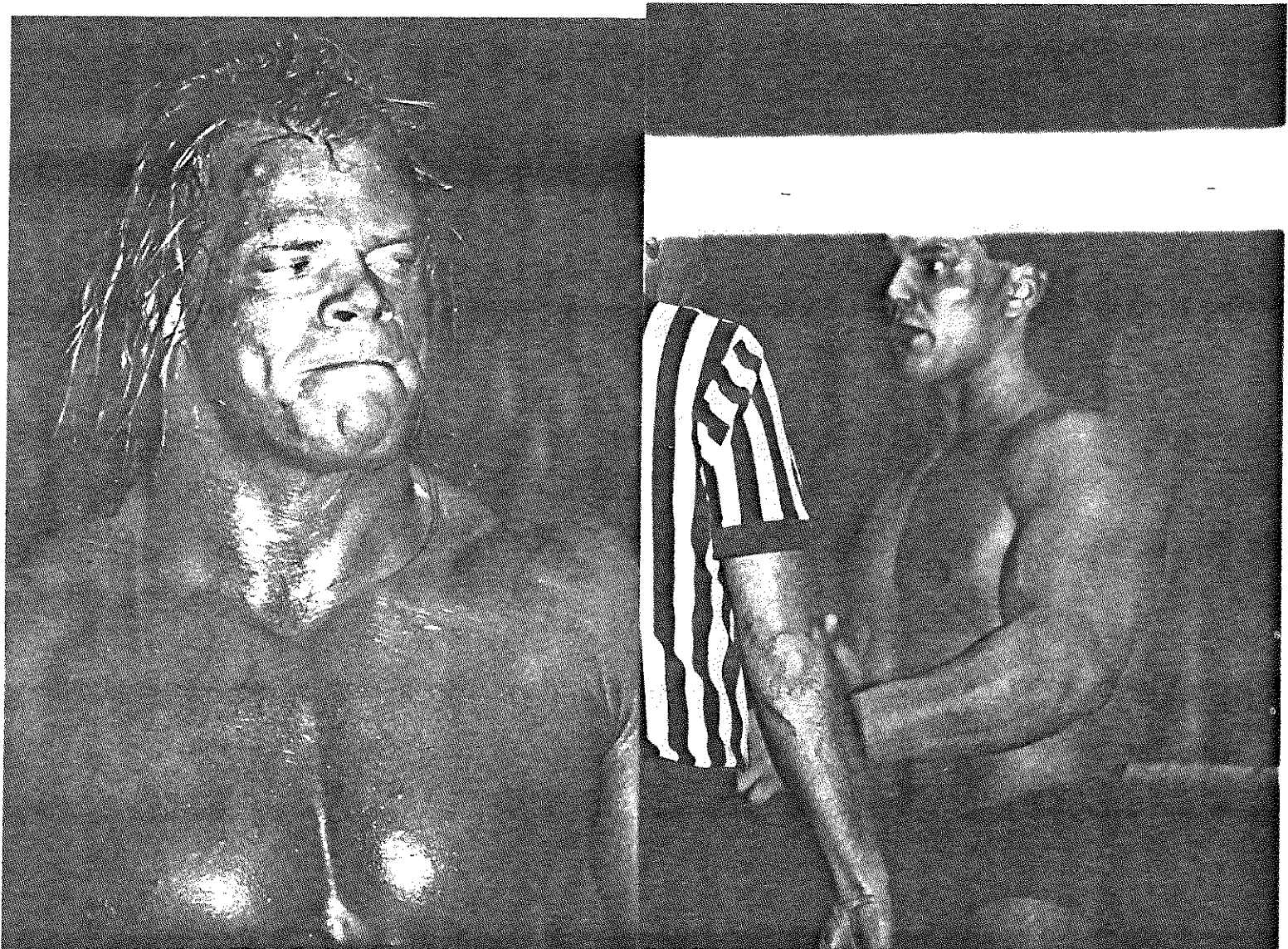
**MATWATCH TV AWARD 1989 WINNERS
IN BEST OF... CATEGORIES**



**RIC FLAIR: BEST BROADCAST/CABLE
& BEST PPV MATCHES**
(Photo by Steve Bryant)



**JIM
ROSS**
Best Play-By-Play Announcer
(Photo by Dennis Brent)



**LEX
LUGER**
Best TV Turn

**SCOTT
STEINER**
Rising Star



JIM CORNETTE
Best Comedian

WORST BROADCAST/ CABLE MATCH

WINNER

Paul Jones vs. Ivan Koloff,
NWA CLASH IV
732 Points

2. DINGDONGS VS. COUGAR JAY/GEORGE SOUTH, NWA CLASH VIII, 612.

3. DINGDONGS VS. SKYSCRAPERS, NWA WORLD WIDE, 364.

We can offer as much prose as possible but Jerry Griffin of Texarkana, TX, said it all: "Has there ever been a worse match than Paul Jones vs. Ivan Koloff with one hand tied behind his back?" Oh, I can think of a few but I can't think of a poorer match on a CLASH, even though a groundswell of folks felt the Dingdongs fit the bill. Ironically, within four months, both Jones and Koloff were gone from the NWA.

The Dingdongs-Jay/South meeting on CLASH VIII from Fort Bragg kicked off the short-lived kid-oriented tag team, which came to the ring with Huckleberry Hound music and incessantly rang a bell during their matches. It also was one of their few wins. Their match vs. the Sky-scrappers was a massacre which ended the masked life of Greg Evans and Richard Sartain.

In all likelihood, the only reason the Andre the Giant-Ultimate Warrior match from NBC's Thanksgiving weekend SNME escaped the top 3 is because it came so late in the balloting but it was a big El Stinko.

OTHERS: Butch Reed vs. Junkyard Dog, NWA CLASH VI (208), Steve Williams vs. Italian Stallion, NWA CLASH IV (132), Dino Bravo vs. Hercules, WWF PRIME TIME (120), Hulk Hogan vs. Bad News Brown, WWF/SNME (112), John Studd vs. Stoney Burke, WWF (64), Sgt. Slaughter vs. Col. DeBeers, SC III (64), Warlord vs. Mark Ming, WWF (45), Andre the Giant vs. Ultimate Warrior, WWF/SNME (40), Dusty Rhodes vs. Steelman, PWF (35), Scott Norton vs. Destruction Crew, AWA (34), Scott Hall vs. Sid Vicious, NWA WCW (33), Tom Zenk vs. Mike Thor, NWA (29), DOOM vs. Gilbert/Rich, NWA (28), Sting vs. Danny Spivey, NWA/NME (27), Nasty Boys vs. Jumbo Baretta/Dennis Knight, PWF (26), Dick Murdoch vs. Bob Orton Jr., NWA (25), Tommy Rich vs. Norman, NWA (23), Norman vs. Mike Justice, NWA CLASH IV (20), Hogan vs. Genius, WWF/SNME (7), SCW Reverse Cage (6), Buddy Roberts vs. Jeff Jarrett (cage), WCCW (5), Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat, NWA CLASH VI (3), Commandos vs. Star Riders, PWF (2), Great Wojo vs. Calypso Jim, CHICAGO CHALLENGE; any Tony Atlas ICW match; Beast vs. Adrian Street, CWF; Hercules vs. Akeem, WWF; Street vs. Terry Garvin, CWF; Slaughter vs. Larry Zbyszko, AWA; Akeem vs. Studd, WWF; and Rhodes vs. Bossman, WWF (all 1).

1988 WINNER: Baron Von Raschke vs. Soldad Ustinov, AWA.

WORST PPV MATCH

WINNER

Tommy Rich vs. Cuban
Assassin, NWA H. HAVOC
624 Points

2. JIMMY VALIANT VS. WAYNE BLOOM, AWA SCIII, 540.

3. POWW LINGERIE BATTLE ROYAL, AWA SCIII, 465.

I called it the second worst pay-per-view match in an earlier MATWATCH edition but enough irritation from fans used to stellar matchups on NWA pay shows created big support for the Rich-Assassin battle as the worst. The HALLOWEEN HAVOC showdown was characterized by a tough Philadelphia crowd which had just cheered the Freebirds against the babyface Dynamic Dudes and Tommy was royally booed. Sierra, usually a good worker, offered a below par performance. Rich won but most were at the concessions.

The other two were from the AWA/WCOW/indie SUPER CLASH III card in December 1988. Valiant's 27-second win over Bloom was the only known squash match which led to the loser being propelled to a push as AWA tag co-champion. At least it was short but it wasn't worth viewers' money. The POWW battle royal was advertised as one to appeal to the sexual appetite of viewers and did not deliver what was advertised. Furthermore, we had to listen to David McLane for 21 minutes, which is comparable to sitting through a rerun of GILLIGAN'S ISLAND.

OTHERS: Andre the Giant vs. Jake Roberts, WWF WRESTLEMANIA V (328), Terry Taylor vs. Bobby Heenan, WWF WM5 (212), Dusty Rhodes vs. Honky Tonk Man, WWF SUMMER SLAM (180), Robin Smith vs. Judy Martin, WWF ROYAL RUMBLE (178), Dino Bravo vs. Ronnie Garvin, WWF WM5 (138), Hercules vs. Greg Valentine, WWF SS (88), Jim Duggan vs. Bad News Brown, WWF WM5 (60), Iceman Parsons vs. Brickhouse Brown, SC III (25), Rougeaus vs. Bushwackers, WWF WM5 (24), Sting vs. Butch Reed, NWA CHI-TOWN RUMBLE (20), Heenan Family vs. Ultimate Warriors, WWF SURVIVOR SERIES (20), Flair/Sting vs. Funk/Muta, NWA HAVOC

(12), BASH Battle Royal, NWA (10), Harley Race vs. Haku, WWF RR (9), Jimmy Snuka vs. Ted DiBiase, WWF SS (5), Z-Man vs. Mike Rotunda, NWA HH (4), any Steve Williams match (1).

1988 WINNER: Ultimate Warrior vs. Hercules Hernandez, WWF WRESTLEMANIA IV.

WORST NEW CHARACTER

WINNER

The Dingdongs, NWA

1,176 Points

2. ZEUS, WWF, 768.

3. Z-MAN, NWA, 292.

Was there any question? In the Jan. 8 edition of MATWATCH, I documented my reasons for voting Mr. Donnie as the worst but with the limited exposure of the Southern promotion, there was no way he would take this "honor," though he finished a respectable fourth.

The Dingdongs, an NWA effort to strike a chord with children, died a combination death of anger from hardcore adult fans and from the Ric Flair booking regime which never gave the team a chance.

Tiny Lister as Zeus was great at grinning and beating his chest. But he offered better physical ability as a bodyguard for Andy Griffith on a MATLOCK two-parter than in any WWF match. For all the buildup of Zeus as a titan the equal of Hulk Hogan, he was exposed at SUMMER SLAM, killing any hope of a WRESTLEMANIA VI

main event between Hogan & Zeus. Z-Man, according to Richard Clawson of Wilmington, N.C., deserves the award for "the most unspectacular premiere of a character with a major push." Tom Zenk, originally scheduled to debut as a space-oriented character with kid appeal, had an outfit designed by TBS which Flair rejected. So, at CLASH VIII, Z-Man was strictly Tom Zenk in his classic white trunks with his "Batman" theme music the only unusual aspect of his arrival.

OTHERS: Mr. Donnie, SCW (117), Widowmaker, WWF, and Commandos, PWF (100 each), "The Model," WWF (92), Bubble Gum Kid, PWF (69), WOMAN, NWA (55), Dr. B.G. Holliday, Stampede (41), Norman, NWA (40), Gator Keirn, PWF (36), Kokina Maximus, AWA (36), Continental Cat, CWF (35), Scott "Flash" Norton, AWA (25), Matman, Portland (24), Dixie Dy-No-Mite, CWF (4), The Trooper, AWA (3), Schoolboy Crush, SCW (3), Dragonmaster, NWA (3), Ronald P. Gossett IV, CWA (3), The Genius, WWF (1), Dynamic Dudes, NWA (1).

1988 WINNER: AKEEM, WWF.

WORST SUPERCARD

WINNER

WRESTLEMANIA V, WWF

860 Points

2. SUPER CLASH III, 616.

3. ROYAL RUMBLE, WWF, 610.

Last year, I concurred with the WM choice because of product delivered

vs. promises offered. To a degree, the same principle held for this year's Atlantic City show with seven bad matches, a disappointing PIPER'S PIT and another horrible casino crowd. But was it really the worst? A majority of you obviously think so.

The Verne Gagne-produced SUPER CLASH, which did feature a quality Jerry Lawler-Kerry Von Erich affair and a good Michael Hayes/Steve Cox vs. Samoan Swat Team, still couldn't get away from forgettables such as Valiant-Bloom, the dreadful POWW battle royal, Parsons-Brown, Greg Gagne-Ronnie Garvin and DeBeers-Slaughter. Only the RUMBLE itself and an acceptable tag win by the Hart Foundation/Duggan combo raised the level of that January 1989 show to mediocrity. A painful Harley Race-Haku match and Robin Smith vs. Judy Martin was a ripoff to viewer \$\$\$\$.

OTHERS: HALLOWEEN HAVOC, NWA (248), WAR IN THE WINDY CITY, AWA (247), THE HOMECOMING, PWF (128), SURVIVOR SERIES, WWF (72), CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS IV, NWA (45), SUMMER SLAM, WWF (3).

1988 WINNER: WRESTLEMANIA IV, WWF.

WORST WEEKLY TV SERIES

WINNER

AWA Championship Wrestling

715 Points

2. SOUTHERN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, 245.

3. ICW WRESTLING, 225.

Considering it is still the prime showcase program for the top sports network in America (ESPN), the AWA certainly rates weekly as the most disappointing (when it airs). What credibility the group had left vanished when the AWA title was stripped from Jerry Lawler in a dispute between Verne Gagne and Jerry Jarrett.

Yet, if SCW had more exposure, it no doubt would be on bottom, unless CHICAGO CHALLENGE went national. SCW has melted from a showcase for Bruiser Brody, Austin Idol, Paul E. Dangerously and commentary by Joe Pedicino into a Class D series only kept alive by Atlanta's WVEU-TV.

Dangerously's booking for ICW shows promise for that group as long as it lasts. But the Mario and Angelo Savoldi-led group has offered some of TV's worst production values.

OTHERS: WWF CHALLENGE (216), WWF ALL-AMERICAN (188), WWF SPOTLIGHT (175), USWA (164), STAMPEDE (108), WWF PRIME TIME (105), PWF (92), BOBBY HEENAN SHOW (75), NWA PRO (68), NWA MAIN EVENT (52), CWA (48), WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, TBS (40), ACW (37), AWF WRESTLING (32), WINDY CITY (29), UWA ALL-STAR (25), BRUISER'S BEDLAM (24), CHICAGO CHALLENGE (20), CWF (19), NWA POWER HOUR (16), NWF (15), WWF SUPERSTARS (12), WWF MAPLE LEAF (8), IWA (1), GLOW (1).

1988 WINNER: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, NWA/TBS.

WORST PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCER

WINNER

David Crockett, NWA

860 Points

2. ED WHALEN, Stampede, 510.

3. BILL MERCER, Texas Superstars, 300.

I think we can safely retire David from this award, though some people who leaned toward voting for him said they couldn't because he was only on NWA shows through early February as a play-by-play announcer. And folks, I have to tell you, if you'd seen Southern, you'd never have voted for David. Still, Roger Thorpe of Woolwine, VA, puts it this way: "I still won't forget how petulant David acted the first week they put Paul E. out there with him on Saturday morning and he refused to even work with Paul. He gets my vote just for that behavior."

Whalen, who also may be without a show with Stampede going off TSN in Canada, jumped from fourth to second in this year's balloting, buoyed by fan anger over Whalen's constant editing of key angles. Mercer had been inactive until his return to the short-lived Tim Brooks-produced TEXAS SUPERSTARS show and I'm convinced many of you voted for Mercer on reputation alone.

OTHERS: Ben Masters, SCW (250), Oliver Humperdink, PWF (192), Alan Starr, SCW (125), Gordon Solie, PWF/NWA (108), Gorilla Monsoon, WWF (80), Gene Ligon, ACW (78), Vince McMahon, WWF (75), Marc Lowrance, USWA (73), Tim Dix, SCW (45), John Heath, PWF (44), Jim Ross, NWA (11), Lee Marshall, AWA (6), Don Coss, Portland (5), Charlie Platt, CWF (5), Larry Nelson, AWA (3), Tony Schiavone, WWF (2), Lance Russell, NWA (2), David McLane, POWW (1), Sean Mooney (1). NOTE: Lord Alfred Hayes received 18 points but does not do play-by-play commentary.

1988 WINNER: David Crockett, NWA.

WORST COLOR COMMENTATOR

WINNER

Verne Gagne, AWA

620 Points

2. (TIE) SHERRI MARTEL, WWF ROYAL RUMBLE, and WAHOO McDANIEL, NWA/WCW, 432 each.

Billy Graham was mercifully executed from the color mike and David Crockett only had a two-week stint on NWA PRO to allow America's favorite practicing target, Verne Gagne, to ascend to the losers' throne. Verne did some color on SUPER CLASH III and periodically stepped to the mike with Lee Marshall on the weekly AWA show. But perhaps the most appropriate comment came when Don Rickles made a brief guest shot in the spring and told viewers, "I knew Verne when he pinned himself."

Carla Willis of Pawtucket RI said, "I still think Sherri was drunk," in regard to Ms. Martel's performance during the Robin Smith-Judy Martin match at the ROYAL RUMBLE. The best thing which could be said for Sherri's effort is it sounded like steel grinding in an auto accident. Wahoo, who was brought in for a two-week stint with Jim Ross in August on WCW, never was and never will be an announcer and profusely dragged the pace down of WCW.

OTHERS: Frank Dusek, WCCW (332), Joe Blanchard, AWA (320), Alan Starr, SCW (176), Magnum T.A., NWA (100), Robert Fuller, CWF (72), Lord Alfred Hayes, WWF (70), Downtown Bruno, CWF

(68), Hillbilly Jim, WWF (68), Gorilla Monsoon, WWF (36), Pete Montana, Stampede (33), Ray Stevens, AWA (25), Jonathan Holliday, CWF (4), Ronald P. Gossett IV, CWF (4), Bob Caudle, NWA (3), Kevin Sullivan, NWA (3), Johnny Valiant, AWA (3), Terrence Garvin, USWA (2), Phil Apollo, ICW (1),

1988 WINNER: Superstar Billy Graham, WWF.

WORST TV ANGLE

WINNER

Dusty Rhodes' Americana, WWF

560 Points

2. RIC FLAIR-TERRY FUNK "Plastic Bag," NWA CLASH VIII, 325.

3. Repeated beatings of TONI ADAMS, USWA, 324.

It can easily be argued that DUSTY'S AMERICANA was not so much an angle as a series of feature segments but they were used as a collective angle to introduce Dusty to WWF viewers. Pizzaman, gas station attendant, plumber---Dusty was all of these, always demeaning to women and literally hitting bottom with a controversial spot reaching into a toilet with his arm and pulling out human waste. It was a segment many local stations refused to run on its second airing.

The violent angles also drew the ire of MATWATCHers. The Funk-Flair "plastic bag" bit when Terry made the save for the Muta-Dick Slater team at CLASH VIII by plopping a plastic bag

over the NWA champion's head was the catalyst for a TBS-mandated end to gratuitous blood and violence. Perpetual attacks on wrestler Chris Adams' wife were of equal distaste, lowlighted by Billy Travis' raising Toni's dress for a spanking, censored in the national package.

OTHERS: Ivan Koloff one-hand vs. Paul Jones, NWA (308), Hulk Hogan atomicdrops Sherri, WWF SUMMER SLAM (245), Scott Norton arm wrestling, AWA (224), Dusty Rhodes spike-in-eye, NWA (204), DOOM attacks Scott Steiner in parking lot, NWA (176), Loser-leave-town matches, WCCW (144), Ronnie Garvin as referee, WWF (105), John Tenta/Dino Bravo doubleteam Ultimate Warrior, WWF (104), Attack on cripples, Portland (96), Beauty & the Beast attacks on Linda Street, CWF (40), Eric Embry blinded, WCCW (9), Honky Tonk Man bashes Snuka with guitar, WWF (5), Matman created, Portland (5), ROBIN becomes WOMAN, NWA (5), Percy Pringle bloodbath, WCCW (5), Dingdongs debut, NWA (5), Tojo dates Toni Adams, USWA (5), Mr. Perfect destroys WWF belt (3), DeBeers-Derrick Dukes feud (3), Embry pukes, USWA (2), Missy/Robin shopping spree, NWA (2), Andre chokes Warrior, WWF (1), Tommy Rich/Mr. Donnie attack Wolfman, SCW (1), Kevin Dillinger as Ultimate Dillinger, CWA (1), Ric Flair interviews, NWA (1).

1988 WINNER: FRITZ VON ERICH suffers "heart attack," WORLD CLASS.

WORST TV TURN

WINNER

Steve Williams, NWA

710 Points

2. ROAD WARRIORS, NWA, 700.

3. RICK MARTEL, WWF, 580.

Dr. Death is becoming the king of the "invisible turn." He went to Japan in the fall of 1988 and suddenly decided to join the Varsity Club for no known reason. He made a return trip to the Orient in the spring of 1989 and allegedly was attacked by Freebird Terry Gordy, ostensibly to return home as a babyface. Fans did not care for the predictability of Williams' turns and it earned him the selection for the second straight year.

Nor were they crazy about the execution of the Road Warriors' quick return to faces in February 1989. "It happened way too fast after they turned on Sting," said Mark Clark of Phenix City AL, "and then they never really had them apologize or have a true reunion with Sting. It's as if it all never happened." Probably Victoria Principal dreamed it. The Martel turn was way too predictable at WRESTLEMANIA V and the accidental hit by Tito Santana was one of the oldest tricks in wrestling.

OTHERS: Al Perez, USWA (177), David Sammartino, SCW (168), Jerry Stubbs, CWF (60), WOMAN, NWA (40), Ric Flair, NWA (28), John Nord, Portland (6), Playboys, PWF (5), Paul Diamond, AWA (5), Norman, NWA (4), Jerry Graham Jr., WWA (3), Jimmy Garvin, NWA (3), Midnight Express, NWA (3), Kendall Windham, NWA (3), Dynamite Kid, Stampede (3), Ricky Morton, CWA (2), Terry Funk, NWA (1), Ronnie Garvin (going from AWA to WWF) (1), Ron Simmons, NWA (1), Dennis Condrey, CWF (1), Brickhouse Brown, CWF (1), Randy Rose, NWA (1), Randy Rose, SCW (1).

1988 WINNER: Steve Williams, NWA.

DECLINING STAR OF THE YEAR

WINNER

Andre the Giant, WWF

490 Points

2. TERRY TAYLOR, WWF, 408.
3. EDDIE GILBERT, NWA, 401 1/2.

Most of America's hardcore fans have long since felt it was time for the benediction on Andre. Embarrassing isn't even a kind word for the Giant's ring performances during 1989 and a November match on TV vs. the Ultimate Warrior had to rank as a record low. Yet, he ended 1989 as half of the WWF tag team champions, which---in itself---may tell the story of Andre's decline from a powerhouse who was never supposed to have a belt.

Taylor, injury-plagued after popping a knee at SUMMER SLAM, has been the source of controversy among fans of the NWA and former UWF group who remember Terry's strong workrate and top ability as a face and heel. MATWATCHERS, as a whole, detest the Red Rooster label but it's made a good living for Terry and his family. The decline of the 1988 MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR is merely a hammerlock of politics within an NWA camp of bookers which have apparently felt threatened by Gilbert's creativity.

OTHERS: Blue Blazer (Owen Hart), WWF/Portland (330), Ted DiBiase, WWF (180), Paul E. Dangerously, NWA (168), Honky Tonk Man, WWF (144), Kevin Von Erich, USWA (141), Fantastics, NWA (125), Mike Rotunda,

NWA, (116), Ronnie Garvin, WWF (80), Brad Armstrong, CWF/Ind. (56), Al Perez, NWA/USWA/PWF/WWF (48), Ric Flair, NWA (45), Tommy Rich, SCW/NWA (33), Lance Russell, NWA (21), The Von Erichs (20), Dick Murdoch, NWA (11), Midnight Express, NWA (9), Stan Lane, NWA (4), Bill Dundee, CWF/USWA/CWA (4), Jim Ross, NWA (3), Jerry Lawler, CWA/USWA (3), Dynamic Dudes, NWA (3), Ed Whalen, Stampede (3), Missy Hyatt, NWA (2 1/2), Tom Prichard, CWF (2), John Studd, WWF (1), Jim Cornette, NWA (1), Buddy Roberts, WCCW (1).

1988 WINNER: ROCK & ROLL EXPRESS, NWA/CWA/AWA/ACW.

WORST TV MUSIC

WINNER

Breakdance Young, NWA

704 Points

2. "AMERICAN DREAM," Dusty Rhodes' theme, WWF, 525.
3. "THE KREMLIN'S GREATEST HITS," Russian Assassins music, NWA, 317.

This is a nothing category just for fun but the first time I heard Vincent Mark Young Pyle Scarpa come out to that trashbarrel music and roll into the breakdance, I knew he'd be booed by everyone in Columbus, Ga., and he was.

Every time I hear Dusty's new theme, I'm convinced Vince McMahon heads a conspiracy to drive me insane. The Russians' music was at least good for a few Jim Ross lines.

OTHERS: AWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING theme (273), "The King's Theme," WWF (216), "Flyin' Brian" drum theme (173), Terrence Garvin, "As Time Goes By" (88), Steiner Brothers theme (32), Slick's "Jive Soul Bro" (28), Curt Hennig's "Exodus" (25), Red Rooster theme (24), Hulk Hogan "Real American" (24), Freebirds theme (23), Z-Man's "Batman" theme (22), Tommy Rich "All My Rowdy Friends" (5), Jimmy Snuka theme (5), Samoan Savage theme (5), Hillbilly Jim "Don't Go Messin' with a Country Boy" (3), Southern Rockers theme (3), Steve Williams' "Bad to the Bone" (3), Dino Bravo's theme (3), Ric Flair's "2001" (3), Butch Reed theme (3), Road Warriors theme (3), Bam Bam Bigelow's NWA "Bam Bam" (1), CWA WRESTLING theme (1), WWF SUPERSTARS theme (1), Skyscrapers theme (1), Dingdongs theme (1).

1988 WINNER: (Tie) "CATCH THE PINFALLS," NWA, and "BAM BAM," Bam Bam Bigelow theme, NWA.

WORST IDEA OF THE YEAR

WINNER

The Dingdongs, NWA

505 1/2 Points

2. DUSTY RHODES sticking hand in toilet, WWF, 395.
3. GEORGE SCOTT as NWA booker, 208.

If they had been given a different name, would it have made any difference, folks? Guess not. It is

the definitive thumbs down to an act which looked more like Touche Turtle and Dum Dum (if you don't remember those cartoons, you ain't old enough).

Despite receiving one letter saying the Dusty-in-toilet bit was one of the most hilarious skits of the year, most of you felt it was among the most offensive. Come to think of it, most MATWATCH readers enjoy voting for any WORST OF... categories which involve Dusty.

In the show position is one element which hasn't been reviewed, the appointment of George Scott as NWA booker in January. Wrestlers were stunned to find the former WWF and World Class matchmaker installed and found themselves in a sea of slow, 1970s-style matches with long rest-holds on TV. Plus, tag team matches on TV had no continuity to arena matchups. At Scott's first TV taping, he had Michael Hayes teamed with Ivan Koloff (the Red Freebirds?) and Eddie Gilbert with Vincent Young (Hot Breakdance Stuff?). His 11-week stint as booker shortcircuited with his banning of NWA announcers from promoting the April 2 CLASH on-air. WCW executives Jack Petrik and Jim Herd returned to Atlanta the week before the CLASH, viewed the previous Saturday's WCW and promptly fired Scott.

OTHERS: Abuse of women, Various (200), RUN DMC's Wrestlemania Rap, WWF (189 1/2), Zeus, WWF (180), Plastic bag angle, NWA (172), Ric Flair as NWA booker (153), Hiro Matsuda as Horsemen manager, NWA (136), Morton Downey Jr. in "Piper's Pit", WWF WRESTLEMANIA V (125), George Scott fails to renew Jim Cornette (100), Vincent Young's breakdancing, WWF (88), Parking lot attack on Scott Steiner, NWA (68), The Bobby Heenan Show, WWF (60), Robin Smith sings "America the Beautiful" at WM5, WWF (54 1/2), WRESTLEMANIA at a casino, WWF (40), Firing of Paul E. Dangerously, NWA (37), Eric Embry "blind-ed," USWA (36), Dusty Rhodes' spike-

in-eye, NWA (35), WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING at 7:05 p.m., NWA (9), Master of Pain as "unified" world champion, CWA (9), Eddie Gilbert dumped from NWA booking committee (5), Oliver Humperdink returns to NWA (5), Andre-Warrior matches, WWF (3), Anti-Japanese angles, NWA (3), Thunderdome cage, NWA (3), Quick return of Cornette/Midnight Express, NWA (1), Lawler playing face & heel at same time, CWA (face)/USWA (heel) (1), WWF hiring Dusty Rhodes (1), Lack of adequate push for Sting, NWA (1), Stampede editing British Bulldogs splitup (1), Failure to re-sign Ricky Steamboat, NWA (1), AWA TEAM CHALLENGE (1), Decline of Eddie Gilbert/Mike Rotunda, NWA (1), AWA dropping "mat classics" from TV (1).

1988 WINNER: FOUR HORSEMEN VITAMINS, NWA.

WORST TV PERSONALITY

WINNER

ULTIMATE WARRIOR, WWF

428 Points

2. ANDRE THE GIANT, WWF, 384.

3. VERNE GAGNE, AWA, 360.

When I shared the outcome of this with someone who works inside a wrestling organization, I was told, "This is the kind of vote that shows you how 'smart fans' don't know as much as they think they do." The expert made the point that Warrior plays exactly the kind of role necessary to get over with a huge throng

kids and he doesn't have to be the most articulate guy in the world to do it." He isn't. And good acting job or not, Jim Hellwig wins the McLean Stevenson Television Futility Award for 1989 with an act that is so bad, he was the second-biggest draw in the World Wrestling Federation.

What else need be said about Andre? The once-invincible behemoth actually closed 1989 by winning a belt, something Vince McMahon Sr. said Andre should never do to preserve his dominance. The best thing that can be said about Andre is he does a great Honey Comb commercial.

And then there's the proverbial Verne (People Are Coming Back to the AWA in Doves) Gagne, who apparently would have to grow hair to win new friends. Even though Verne finished third, we at least saw less of him last year. Now, if only Greg....

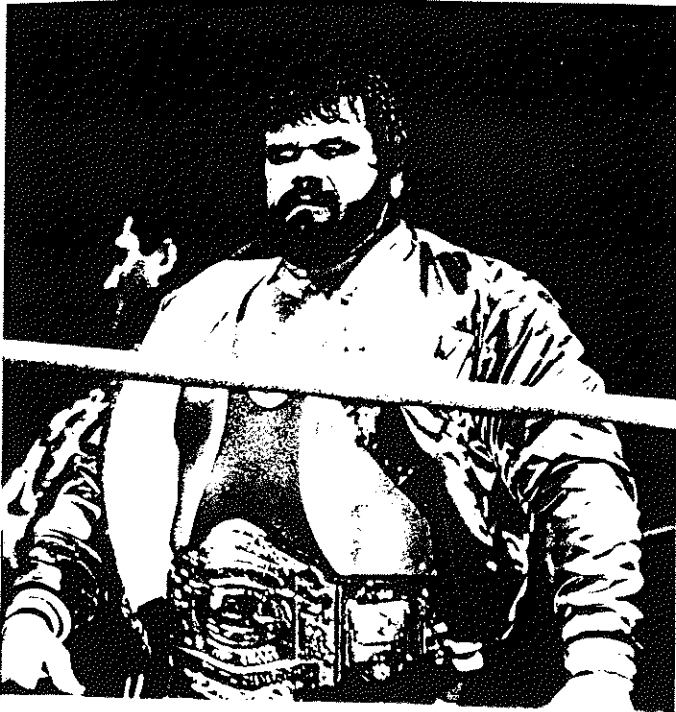
OTHERS: David Crockett, NWA (324), Iron Sheik, NWA (260), Ed Whalen, Stampede (220), Mr. Donnie, SCW (180), Oliver Humperdink, NWA/PWF, and Frank Dusek, WCCW (100 each), Robert Gibson, Various (65), Vince McMahon Jr., WWF (58), Ron Slinker, PWF (27), Eric Embry, USWA (26), Hulk Hogan, WWF (24), Marc Lowrance, USWA (20), Larry Nelson, AWA (18), Hillbilly Jim, WWF (16), Gorilla Monsoon, WWF (15), Ray Candy, SCW/PWF (13), Jim Ross, NWA (5), Ric Flair, NWA (5), Gary Hart, NWA (4), Ben Masters, SCW (4), Hiro Matsuda, NWA (4), Jim Duggan, WWF (4), Fatu, NWA (3), Alan Starr, SCW (3), Brutus Beefcake, WWF (3), Dino Bravo, WWF (3), Charlie Platt, CWF (3), P.Y. Chu'i, CWA/USWA (3), Steve Williams, NWA (1), Paul Jones, NWA (1), Brian Pillman, NWA (1), Al Perez, PWF/USWA/WWF (1), Leon Spinks, CHICAGO CHALLENGE (1), Flash Norton, AWA (1), Percy Pringle, USWA (1), John Heath, PWF (1), Tommy Rich, NWA (1).

1988 WINNER: David Crockett, NWA.

**MATWATCH TV AWARDS: THE WORST
OF 1989**



THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR
Worst TV Personality



STEVE WILLIAMS
Worst TV Turn



ANDRE THE GIANT
Declining Star

THE AWARDS: YOU SAID IT!!!

"If you are a fan of professional wrestling, you were allowed to watch possibly the greatest wrestling matches of the decade: Flair vs. Steamboat, Flair vs. Funk, Hogan vs. Savage, Rockers vs. Tully & Arn. And the key word here is WATCH. Is it any wonder the house shots don't seem as important today?---BOBBY WILK

"Gorilla Monsoon should get an honorable mention for best play-by-play announcer for a surprisingly good performance at WRESTLEMANIA."---ED VARNER, Seattle WA

"BEST COMEBACK WRESTLERS: 1. Terry Funk. 2. Ricky Steamboat. 3. Roddy Piper. 4. Davey Boy Smith."---KEVIN KING, Bronx NY

"Rising Star of the Year was a tough category. I liked several I didn't vote for."---LARRY LOVELL

"The year was dominated by "shoot" promos. When Flair told Funk, "You're rubbing with Sylvester Stallone," you could just feel his resentment of Funk....Paul E's final DANGER ZONE was the most dynamic performance by ANY heel since Austin Idol's promo the week before his hair match with Lawler in 1987...Randy Savage's promos showed Jesse & Roddy aren't Hollywood's only WWF prospects."---ABRAHAM CHOPIN, New York, NY

"I voted for Jim Ross and gladly so but I won't next year if he goes into any more of those comments like he made every week about Missy Hyatt. Leave that to the wrestlers, Jim."---ANGIE MOBLEY, Valdosta GA

"How about (Jimmy) Snuka's Rick Steiner dog bark ripoff (as worst idea)? The Heenan Show?"---KEVIN BURKE, Albany NY

"The 3/18 brawl in Portland had Carl Stiles rip the door off and ended with Buddy Rose being thrown into it & breaking it in half. A really, really wild brawl!"---STEVE MASTROPIETRO, Mechanicville NY

"How about best/worst interview?
BEST: Savage, Funk. WORST:

Warrior---does he speak English?"---CHARLIE MATTOS, Miami FL

"Why was Halloween Havoc in the WORST PPV category? It wasn't that bad. I took this card over any WWF main events. WWF stinks."---JOHNNY TSCHUA, Providence RI.

"I'm sick of woman-bashing and having every woman portrayed as a half-dressed slut. Randy Savage's brutalizing Sherri is awful, too."---CANDI KAUTZER, Aberdeen NJ

"Special Bad Taste Award of the Decade goes to Verne Gagne for justifying Frank Goodish's (Bruiser Brody's) murder (in PRO WRESTLING TORCH)."---Chris Zavisa, Plymouth MI

"Terry Funk for MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR---NO contest!"---Dick Bourne, Alexander City AL

"You list Magnum and not Al Hayes (in WORST COLOR COMMENTATOR nominees)? Come on."---ED VARNER

"Overall, Piper's had most effect on TV this year, about the only bright spot in the WWF right now, despite a year that could only be described as a nightmare for him. Flair turning face was no great shakes and Cornette was not very effective as a face. Overall, not an outstanding year, save Flair-Steamboat."---TERESA DeMARIE, Tuckahoe NY

"This year was bad. Only a handful of "Best of..." and millions that deserve "worst." As for the POWW Battle Royal, thank God the clothes stayed on."---SCOTT DECKER, Hamden CT

"While all awards are silly, they are something to fill out when work is slow."---RANDALL FANNING, Lynchburg TN

"The Flair-Funk (CLASH IX) and Flair-Steamboat (at New Orleans) matches were the two finest on TV I've seen in 15 years."---SCOTT TOMKOWIAK, Downers Grove IL

"Amazing the WWF had two of the three worst (Andre/Warrior) and put them up against each other."---JEFF COHEN, Great Neck NY

"I can't consider what the WWF does as the worst in any category. Yes, the Red Rooster is degrading but he is cheered and Wrestlemania V was boring but look how successful. The NWA giving Flair the booking job is ludicrous. He is just as bad as Rhodes with his cronyism but because of his technical ability everyone overlooks his faults. Pushing Slater, Hart and now Sawyer, while holding back Gilbert and Dangerously is criminal."---JOHN McMULLEN, Haddonfield NJ

"WWF is awful. AWA show is bad. They show some of their cable matches on the local show. NWA WORLD WIDE on here---sure miss Lance Russell but I like Chris Cruise."---DAVE KESSEL, St. Paul MN

"Most of your nominees are very close and accurate. Hard not to agree with your choices in most areas. Still, I feel 1989 has been a better year for the sport than 1988 and I don't want to predict 1990." --J.D. McKAY, Louisville MS

"The Bee Gees should sue Dr. B.G. Holliday for defamation of character." ---JOE MANNION, Prospect Park PA

"Imagine Monsoon working alone, forgetting or not mentioning jobbers' names and using his tired cliches. I didn't go with George Scott as booker as the worst idea, even though it was a good choice. Flair's booking hasn't been great either. The "musical" acts at WM5 were terrible ideas, also."---LARRY LOVELL, Hillsville VA

"Zeus and the Dingdongs were the worst ideas of the year. The NWA must give Ric Flair time as booker to produce. The NWA should not let Eddie Gilbert get away."---MIKE MONTESANO, Rochester NY

"Worst Decision by a Promotion: 1) NWA for dropping Missy Hyatt; 2) NWA for pushing Gary Hart; 3) Thunderdome cage."---JOHN A. D'AMATO, Bellmore NY

"You had to know something was up at WRESTLEMANIA when Rockin' Robin does a worse butcher job on 'America the Beautiful' than Winn-Dixie does on my steaks."---LEE CROSS, Gaffney SC

"I can't believe you put Magnum T.A. in the nominees for Worst Color Commentator, or are you as heartless as the NWA people who fired him?"---MARIE CLEAVER, DesPlanes IL

"I think Flair as booker is worse than George Scott as booker because we expected so much more out of Ric. I don't think 1990 will be the year of Flair."---TIM DELL, Alachua FL

"Worst Play-By-Play Announcer: 1) Jim Ross; 2) Jim Ross; 3) Jim Ross."---RANDALL FANNING

"I think Chris Cruise will be one of the Rising Stars of 1990. He has a style that wears well on you."---CARSON JONES, Norfolk NE

"Wouldn't it be a hoot if Jim Ross & Tony Schiavone were back together in the WWF?"---ED ARNOLD, Shallotte NC

"Terry Funk made the whole year for me and it wasn't much of a year. But it was a treat to tune in every week and find something entertaining and Terry never failed to deliver. Even when FUNK'S GRILL wasn't so hot, it wasn't Terry's fault."---BOB CROOMES, Homerville GA

"My memorable moment was seeing Gordon Solie host WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING again in October. Just to see him get one shot to rub in the face of Jim Crockett for ever letting him go was enough for me."---JAMES D. BLALOCK II, Waycross GA

"I don't know who you're naming as your man of the year but I'll choose Hogan just for winning the title back and the fact that the WWF maintained its big lead, even though it didn't do anything really spectacular. I love the NWA but they didn't do what we thought they were going to do." --CECIL THOMSON, El Centro CA

"I voted for Eddie Gilbert as Declining Star of the Year but I want Eddie to know it's not his fault. I hope Ric Flair and his whole group of cronies take it on the chin one day for what they've done to him." ---JEFF MORGAN, Chipley FL

"Typical of the NWA's year: having a guy like Steamboat and not figuring out how to keep him."---JOHN DeMANE, Siloam Springs AR

THE ART OF WRESTLING:

MATWATCH CARTOONS

We've been serious enough for the first 50 pages. It's time to put MATWATCH at ease for THE DECADE THAT CHANGED IT ALL, so we share with you some comics and caricatures which symbolize some of the best artistic creativity offered to MATWATCH for 1989.

First, we introduce you to a new artist, Jim Connaroe---a youth minister in Opelika AL---who happens to be one talented man with the pen. Jim brings you three recent creations, caricatures of the Great Muta, Sting and Lex Luger, all suitable for framing. We're very proud to share Jim's gift with you in the 1989 ANNUAL and hope to offer more from him in regular issues of MATWATCH.

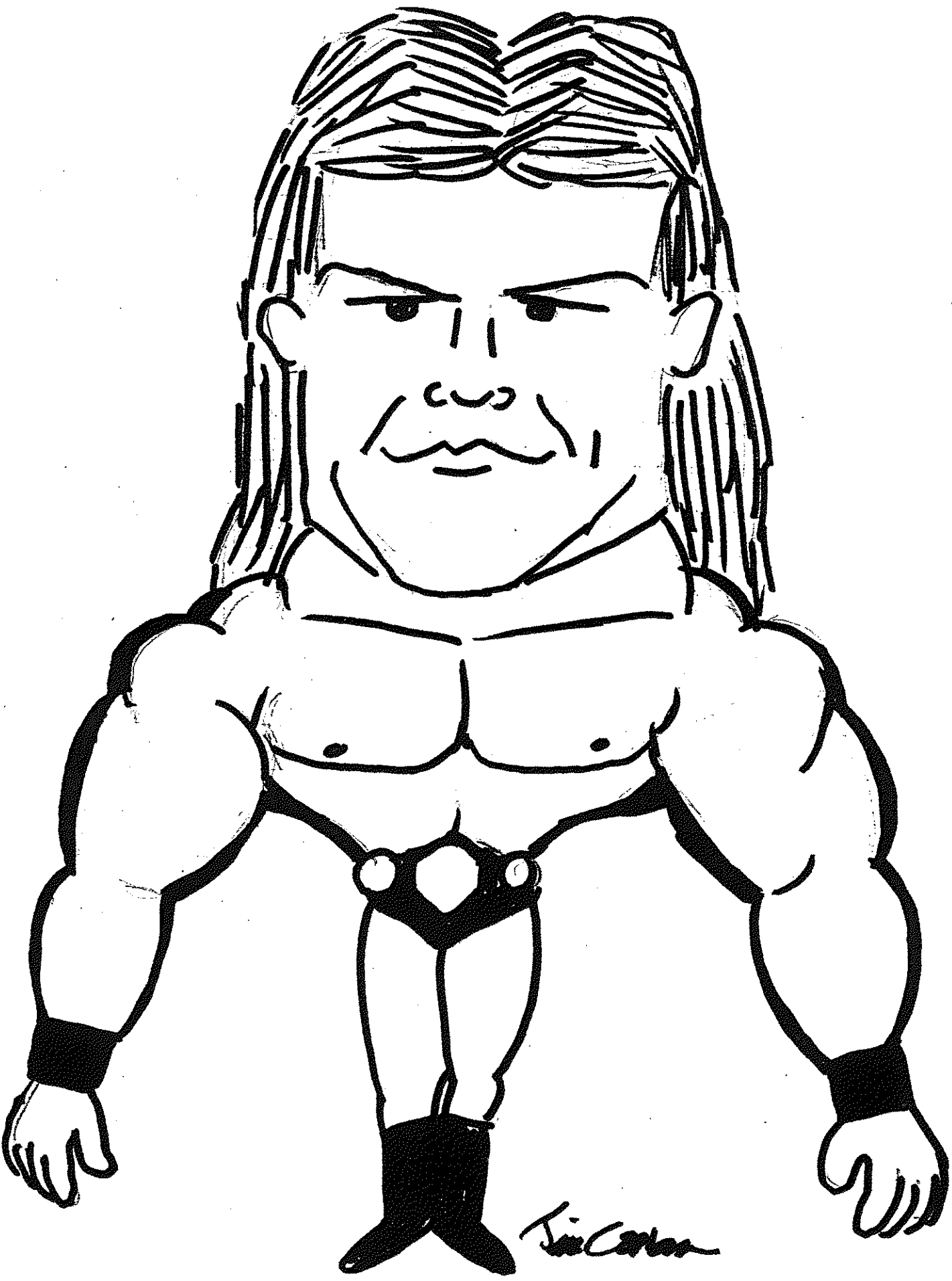
Next, we bring two classics back from Las Vegas' own Bill Kunkel, a periodic contributor to our cartoon efforts. Bill's drawings of Andre the Giant and Joe Pedicino gained a lot of response during the year, so we repeat the two, since we've gained more than 400 new subscribers since the Andre effort. Bill is also a regular contributor to Video Games and Computer Entertainment magazine, where he often reviews the latest wrestling video games on the market.

Then, we bring back a fellow who's popped up on occasion in MATWATCH. OSCAR, by George A. Cracker, is back and we have a short biography of the guy who never seems to get a break. We meet Oscar's wife, his neighbor and someone who must be his kid, although Oscar probably doesn't claim him. Oscar is the perpetually frustrated couch potato/wrestling fan and we offer four of his newest adventures.

If you'd like to contribute a cartoon or artwork to MATWATCH, we'd love to consider it. Please submit your cartoon on paper you can spare and be certain to photocopy it for your own protection. MATWATCH is not responsible for lost or damaged art work and will not accept drawings which appear in other publications. Send your cartoons to: MATWATCH, 213 PINE HILLS AVE., AUBURN AL 36830. Now, let's go to the funnies.







Tai Carter

KUNKEL'S CLASSICS



"THE DREAM EXPLAINS
STARRCADE #1"
COLLECT 'EM ALL!

POTSHOT LOOKS AT JOE PEDICINO'S ANATOMY

I AM JOE PEDICINO'S HAIR. I AM COMBED DOWN IN THE MANNER TRADITIONAL TO ALL MEN WITH RECEEDING HAIRLINES. I AM HAPPY WITH MY CURRENT ROLE.

WE ARE JOE PEDICINO'S EARS! AND WE HEAR THAT THE NOSE IS HOT, HOT, HOT!

WE ARE JOE PEDICINO'S EYES AND WE ARE UNHAPPY WITH THE PUSH NOSE IS GETTING! WE FEEL WE ARE MORE IMPORTANT!

I AM JOE PEDICINO'S MOUTH -- AND IF IT WASN'T FOR ME, YOU'D ALL BE OUT OF WORK!

AND I AM THE STAR OF THIS SHOW -- JOE PEDICINO'S NOSE! I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS STARDOM, BUT I WON'T SHIRK MY DUTY!

HOLD ON A MINUTE, GUYS -- WE ARE JOE PEDICINO'S CHINS -- AND WE'VE GOT YOU ALL OUTNUMBERED!!



DOES JOE'S NOSE
KNOW SOMETHING
WE DON'T???

OSCAR

By GEORGE A. CRACKER

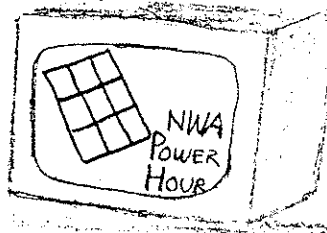


He is the Wile E. Coyote of wrestling fans. The perennial loser. Somehow, Oscar always seems to have the TV on and it's always tuned to wrestling. His neighbors swear he's actually on a never-ending episode of TWILIGHT ZONE in which he has created the world's only 24-hour TV wrestling network, which only he can see. But people seem to interrupt every match he watches and his wife wouldn't be caught dead admitting her husband is a wrestling junkie. The only person in the house who seems to understand his passion for wrestling is Oscar's black cat, who always seems to be near the TV with his master.

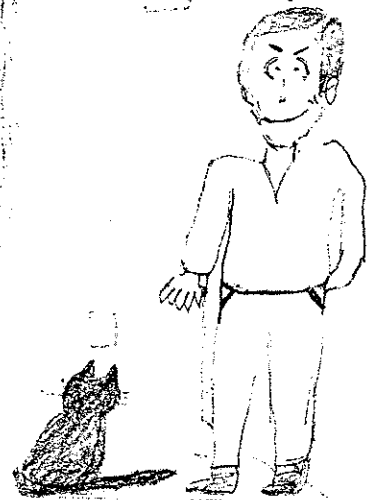
Somehow, Oscar's brief adventures always bring to mind a wrestling cliché. If a fire broke out in his house during the NWA POWER HOUR, he'd have to wait to make his escape until he heard Gordon Solie's "personal word, if you please."

For MATWATCHers, there's perhaps a bit of Oscar in all of us. Maybe one of these days, he'll get to see a whole match without being treated like Rodney Dangerfield. After all, that TV will always be there. Is Oscar the alter ego of artist George A. Cracker? All George will say is his most memorable moment was at the 1988 ROYAL RUMBLE, when a kid held up a sign proclaiming HULKAMANIA IS DEAD!

HUCKAMANIA
IS
DEAD !!!!!



A PERSONAL
NOTE,
IF YOU
PLEASE,
OSCAR!

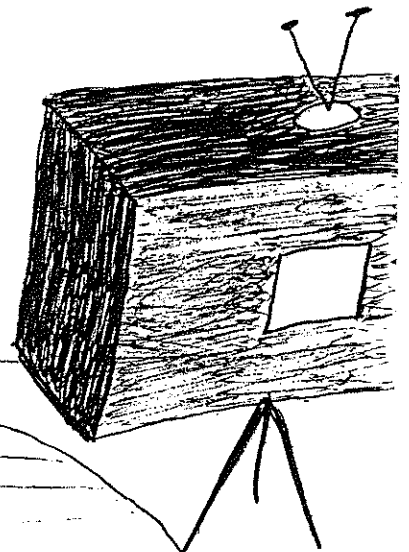


© 1990

OSCAR
BY
George A. Cracker



Things Are
Breakin'
Down Around
Here,
OSCAR!



OSCAR

BY
George A. Cracker

©1990/G.A.C.



MATWATCH TOP TEN TV WRESTLING

NEWS STORIES OF 1989

The year 1989 brought the anticipation of a genuine television war over professional wrestling with the entry of Turner Broadcasting System into promotional ownership. The war evolved more into hit-and-miss skirmishes but nonetheless provided fodder for discussion among countless wrestling insiders, hardcore fans and analysts.

As was the case in last year's annual, MATWATCH selects the stories we feel have had the most impact from the television side of pro wrestling. Clearly, individual matches or arena cards may have had equal emphasis; however, as the TV viewer's guide to pro wrestling, here is our elite of '89:

PAY WARS: WRESTLEMANIA V VS.

1

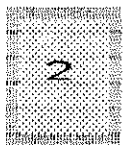
WRESTLE WAR '89

If anything threatened the entire trend of pay-per-view TV wrestling and, potentially, financial structure of the industry in 1989, this behind-the-scenes media war intensified the Vince McMahon-Ted Turner skirmishes. The first match ignited when McMahon challenged the NWA's CHI-TOWN RUMBLE February pay special with a head-on USA Cable card (after originally planning to air his Madison Square Garden card live on USA). The FACE TO FACE "debate" special drew good cable ratings. Then, Titan went to major cable operators with an ultimatum to accept lower revenues for WRESTLEMANIA V or face a blackout of the show.

Titan's terms so angered cable executives that several approached Ted Turner personally about producing a competing show April 2 for pay-per-view. Despite advice against following CHI-TOWN so quickly, Turner committed to WRESTLE WAR '89: THE ULTIMATE GAMBLE. WCW President Jack Petrik told MATWATCH: "Vince wants it both ways. It's okay for him to run a show opposite ours but it's not supposed to be okay for us to challenge him. We're not going to stand for it."

However, faced with the threat of airing a WRESTLEMANIA with only five million homes cleared, McMahon backed off his money demands and the revolting cable operators somewhat left Turner hanging out to dry, asking him to drop the April 2 challenge. Turner Home Entertainment merely postponed WW'89 but TBS, angered at the scenario, countered WM5 with CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS VI: RAGIN' CAJUN CLASH, a 3 1/2-hour live special from New Orleans, which drew a 4.3 rating and 10 per cent share of audience. WRESTLEMANIA, top-lined by Hulk Hogan's regaining the WF world title from Randy Savage, drew a 6% buy rate, much lower than the 8.5% Titan was forecasting and an approximate \$20 million gross from all operations.

The offshoot of the war saw both companies expand to five pay shows during 1989 from a planned four, the NWA adding WRESTLE WAR '89: MUSIC CITY SHOWDOWN from Nashville in May and the WWF annexing NO HOLDS BARRED: THE MATCH/THE MOVIE in late December.



SEXIST/VIOLENT TV ANGLES:

ALL ARE GUILTY

While 1989 was a year difficult to categorize, if one wanted a subtitle, it might be "The Year of Abusing Women." Virtually every major promotion, particularly in the fall, shifted to tasteless angles which centered around the abuse of female valets, managers, wrestlers or wives of wrestlers. Others intensified use of gratuitous violence.

The most trumpeted incident came at the WWF's SUMMER SLAM '89 when, in a post-match situation, Hulk Hogan atomic dropped Sherri Martel to set up a purse-bashing by Liz Poffo. In context, the angle was structured as revenge for several interference attempts by Sherri during the main event. But many fans were offended by Hogan, ever the role model for children, physically punishing a woman.

Earlier in the year, the NWA had been on the female abuse trend when, on NWA PRO WRESTLING, the Great Muta sprayed mist in the face of Missy Hyatt during an interview segment.

But the battle for sexist tastelessness was waged by both the CWF and USWA in the fall. For five consecutive weeks, Beauty & the Beast, a heel CWF team, attacked Adrian Street's wife, Linda---once using hedgeclippers to "break her arm" and repeatedly bodyslamming her in a cage. Booker Robert Fuller endlessly repeated the angles, stopping short of a planned setup of Linda "becoming pregnant" and "losing the baby" at six months after an attack by the Stud Stable. Fortunately, the angle was vetoed.

In Dallas, Jerry Jarrett's USWA centered fall angles around perpetual physical abuse of Chris Adams' wife, Toni---mostly by Billy Travis but also by Tojo Yamamoto and Devastation, Inc. One angle was partially censored when Travis raised Toni's dress to beat her.

Wrestling journalists decried the increased violence and MATWATCH detailed the growing intolerance of fans in an October column.

TBS, showing acts of desperation, allowed Terry Funk to attack Ric Flair with a plastic bag over the head at the September CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS in Columbia, S.C., a lethal act Funk and announcers told children never to try the following weekend. Further, Scott Steiner was "beaten" in a parking lot attack similar to the Dusty Rhodes/Four Horsemen angle of 1985.

Not just coincidentally, TV ratings (see Story 6) for all cable wrestling shows declined, concurrent with the stepped-up violence. TBS was further threatened with cancellation of its HALLOWEEN HAVOC show by pay distributor Viewer's Choice when the plastic bag angle turned up in early promotion and a Parental Discretion Advised disclaimer was used. Thereafter, Jack Petrik and WCW executive vice president Jim Herd ordered an end to blood angles and excessive violence on all NWA programs.

3

CLASH IX: FUNK-FLAIR "I QUIT" MATCH SECOND MOST-WATCHED CABLE MATCH IN HISTORY

It may or may not have been Terry Funk's final match but the end to the Funk-Ric Flair saga in an I QUIT match November 15 from Troy, N.Y., struck a raw nerve with viewers. The match millions apparently wanted to see was the second most-viewed single cable match in history with 3.43 million homes tuned in (if a repeat showing is added, it was the most-viewed).

Innovative use of a wireless microphone to hear concessions was not just used at the end of the match throughout, heightening the drama as the 5,200 at the RPI Fieldhouse quieted to hear Funk chasten Flair to concede. The dramatic use of audio brought the emotions of the match in a personal sense never previously heard on TV wrestling.

4

ON-AIR PROMOTION OF "NO HOLDS BARRED" BY WWF

Despite producing a movie which lost millions and reportedly cost WWF chief Vince McMahon \$10 million of his personal fortune, the TV promotional blitz for NO HOLDS BARRED, a film starring Hulk Hogan and Tiny Lister, which critic Roger Ebert labeled "a disaster," was a McMahon masterstroke.

At a time when the NWA's Ric Flair turn potentially could have turned a number of national viewers' eyes, McMahon kept the publicity fires burning on the WWF with weekly interview blitzes and clips from the movie for a two-month period and structured his main event for SUMMER SLAM '89 as a followup to the Rip vs. Zeus finale of NO HOLDS. Hogan was covered by Turner's own Cable News Network touring schools and touting Christian values and plugged the movie on the syndicated ARSENIO HALL SHOW. McMahon gave rare personal interviews to NBC's TODAY and LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN, the latter of which was not one of Vince's memorable efforts.

The overall campaign kept attention focused on the WWF nationally during the NWA's GREAT AMERICAN BASH tour and at a time when Titan crowds were declining, reaped intangible rewards through television in reinforcing the WWF name and Hogan stardom to the U.S. public.

5

RIC FLAIR-RICKY STEAMBOAT SERIES AND FLAIR TURN

As detailed earlier in 25 EVENTS WHICH SHAPED THE DECADE OF THE '80S and the Terry Funk MAN OF THE YEAR profile, the Flair-Steamboat TV series of matches and epilogue: the long-anticipated turn of Flair to a babyface offered some of the most respected ring work in the history of pro wrestling.

The Steamboat return, carefully built over a four-week period of problems Eddie Gilbert encountered with the Four Horsemen, saw the former mid-Atlantic and WWF star bring a combination of speed, aerials and ground attack which complimented Flair's trademark style in continuing a ring rivalry which never really had concluded from its legendary 1985 match in the New Jersey Meadowlands "Night of Champions" topline.

Steamboat and Gilbert defeated Flair and Barry Windham in the Jan. 21 WCW main event, set up by ten minutes of the best selling ever by Gilbert before

he tagged Steamboat for the eventual pin of Flair, which set up the five-month series.

The rivalry reached one peak on Feb. 20 when Steamboat packaged Flair in 22 minutes to win the NWA world belt at CHI-TOWN RUMBLE. A second TV collision, at the April 2 RAGIN' CAJUN CLASH on TBS, ended with Steamboat taking 2-out-of-3 falls from Flair in 54 minutes but a reverse camera angle showed Flair with his leg on the ropes as the final pin was counted.

Flair regained the belt May 7 in Nashville's WRESTLE WAR '89 in 31:33 to end what may have been one of the last series ever between traditional wrestling tacticians. The post-script came when Terry Funk, a judge for the Nashville title showdown, decked Flair and piledrove him into an 11-week hiatus during an angle MATWATCH readers have voted the 1989 MEMORABLE TV MOMENT OF THE YEAR.

TV RATINGS: A 1989 ROLLERCOASTER

6

In the 1988 MATWATCH annual, we predicted syndication ratings for the two major wrestling organizations would either level off or erode slightly during the year. Our forecast was for an 8 average rating for the WWF and a 5-6 for the NWA's Wrestling Network. The crystal ball was close to the mark. For the period ended mid-November, WWF syndication posted an 8.2 average rating (peaking at 11.2 shortly before WRESTLEMANIA and hitting a low of 7.2 in the fall) and the NWA scored a 5.3, hitting a low of 4.2 at mid-summer and rising to an 8.3 the week of its September CLASH special.

But cable ratings were like the stock market, fluctuating wildly during 1989 with the Jim Ross/Paul E. Dangerously-hosted NWA MAIN EVENT taking the early lead among cable shows until mid-spring when the USA Network's WWF PRIME TIME WRESTLING began rising and assumed the flagship role. A June 5 edition of PTW actually topped a TBS CLASH special from Fort Bragg, N.C., in the same week. When Roddy Piper was added to the series, PTW became the first weekly wrestling show to draw a 4.0 rating (in mid-August) in nearly three years.

A ratings-suicidal move for TBS came in January when WCW was moved out of its 17-year-old 6:05 p.m. time slot to make way for the sports anthology, U.S. OLYMPIC GOLD. Airing through the winter at 7:05 p.m., WCW showed slight erosion through a series of lifeless George Scott-produced shows. But in April, concurrent with Atlanta Braves baseball and at a time Jim Ross-produced episodes livened the series, WCW was moved all over the TBS schedule, airing as late as 11:35 p.m. (EDT) and increasingly difficult for viewers to find. The floating schedule chipped away at the audience and WCW posted a record low 1.4 rating in early June, one of many weeks the series failed to deliver at least a million cable homes. WCW president and TBS board member Jack Petrik appealed to Ted Turner himself and WCW returned to 6:05 in late June.

All wrestling shows appeared to be on a dangerous ratings trend from late August to mid-October, during a nine-week period when angles on many series grew increasingly violent. At least two weeks during the period, the top-rated cable series only drew a 2.5 rating. In early November, NWA programs---bolstered with stronger TV main events---rallied and the last two months on 1989, WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING returned to its former prominence as the top cable series, averaging in December its highest audience levels since May 1988. A Sting-Lex Luger match in December posted a 3.7 rating, tops for any WCW event during the year. Four of the final eight weeks of the year, both WCW and MAIN EVENT topped PTW and WWF ALL-AMERICAN on USA in the Nielsens, though PRIME TIME was showing signs of rebounding to pre-fall levels in the latter part of December.



THE MAIN EVENT: SAVAGE TURNS ON NBC BUT FEWER WATCH

The 1988 NBC special, THE MAIN EVENT, wrestling's first prime time offering on network TV since the 1950s, was the most-watched wrestling program in history. In 1989, a campaign carefully crafted from the WWF's SURVIVOR SERIES to build tension in the Megapowers' (Hulk Hogan/Randy Savage) relationship offered all the tools for another possible record.

But a weaker followup network lineup on NBC, coupled with the inevitable erosion in fan interest produced a dip in the ratings for the 1989 MAIN EVENT. Nielsen figures gave the Hogan/Savage vs. Twin Towers confrontation an 11.6 and 19 per cent share of the audience, a 24 per cent drop from the previous year's Hogan-Andre the Giant showdown.

Outside the ratings arena, one major innovation and a memorable blooper occurred on the special. When Savage came crashing out of the ring onto his wife, Liz Poffo, "knocking her out," Hogan carried her from the arena floor into a first-aid station. Hand-held cameras followed Hogan, Liz and paramedics into the emergency area and stayed with that storyline eight full minutes with Hogan praying for Liz's recovery while the action continued in the arena.

After the local station break, Hogan, apparently not aware the cameras were live, implored his floor crew: "I need a cue...we 'tis on? I need a cue." Then, he abruptly returned to character to mourn over Liz. As a side note, Hogan---attacked by Savage with the WWF belt in the first-aid area after returning to the arena to win the match---gave dish owners another unexpected bit seconds after the live telecast ended. Hogan, who had been frantically searching and calling for Savage down a corridor much as the little boy at the end of the movie, "Shane," opened a final door, stopped and ended the angle. A cameraman yelled, "That was GREAT!" Hogan responded, "Really?"



ANNOUNCER SHUFFLE: TONY SCHIAVONE LEAVES NWA; LANCE RUSSELL DEPARTS MEMPHIS

When 1989 began, the NWA's Tony Schiavone---after five years of experience with Jim Crockett---was regarded as a good but still-improving young wrestling announcer, bolstered by a year of work on TBs with the well-regarded Jim Ross. But he was never on a list of potential candidates to jump to the World Wrestling Federation. And few people estimated the amount of chaos such a departure would cause.

But Schiavone's surprise decision to join the Titan package in February created a spiral of NWA announcer shifts which still continues. Schiavone had originally agreed to but not signed a TBS contract in excess of \$100,000 to continue with the Turner/NWA package. But when TBS decided to make Ross the primary host of the two top SuperStation series and top play-by-play announcer for pay-per-view shows, Schiavone became disenchanted with taking over the emcee role for both NWA WORLD WIDE and NWA PRO WRESTLING in syndication. Even when told he would "host" (a la Jim McKay) all pay-per-view events and CLASH specials, Schiavone was not assuaged and laid the blame on TBS program executive Jeff Carr.

New WCW executive vice president Jim Herd had made the decision to split the Schiavone-Ross team, feeling both provided strengths in play-by-play to aid in developing new color announcers and provide exclusivity to each half of the cable/syndication package. Carr, asked his opinion, recommended Ross for TBS but never asked for Schiavone's removal and did not have final say-so.

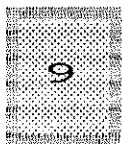
Schiavone took his talents to the WWF for an eventual role on WWF WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT, sans his traditional moustache, and in summer, moved to WRESTLING CHALLENGE as play-by-play announcer. Schiavone hosted his first WWF pay show in August, SUMMER SLAM '89.

The Schiavone departure, coming one week prior to the Feb. 5 CLASH V in Cleveland, left the NWA syndicated package in a major bind. The search opened the door for another major change in one of the U.S.'s most beloved remaining regional territories.

Lance Russell, veteran of the Memphis CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING show, for years often the top-rated program on the entire WMC-TV lineup, answered Turner's call to take over the reins of WORLD WIDE WRESTLING and the TBS/syndicated NWA MAIN EVENT. Russell, regarded by many viewers as the essence of Memphis TV in much the same fashion as Gordon Solie was revered by Florida and TBS viewers for years, left a gaping hole which started a major ratings decline for the CWA show. The year ended with an announcement of Memphis being downgraded to a rookie show for wrestlers trying to jump to Jerry Jarrett's USWA promotion.

Russell, adied by an early color stint by Ric Flair, got off to a quality start but format-tinkering and complaints from Northeast station managers who disapproved of Lance's Southern style forced a change. Russell took over the play-by-play role on NWA PRO, the promotion's "B" show. But the syndicated package, which does not give the hosts latitude to become actively involved in many interviews and angles, failed to showcase Lance in his best light as in his frequent confrontational interviews with heels in Memphis.

The checkerboard moves forced Ross back onto WORLD WIDE until Chris Cruise was hired in September and until Terry Funk joined Cruise and Caudle shifted to color on NWA PRO with Russell, TBS was in a perpetual scramble to find the right sidekicks for its lead hosts.



WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING LEAVES WTBS STUDIO

The smallish quarters on Techwood Drive will never be the same. The April Fool's Day edition on WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING on TBS marked the end of an Atlanta tradition dating back to 1951, when wrestling first premiered on the ABC/DuMont affiliate in a studio.

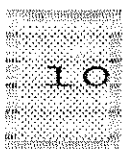
LIVE ATLANTA WRESTLING, as it was known until an early '70s change to GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, had boosted the careers of Haystacks Calhoun, the Assassins, Mr. Wrestling (Tim Woods), Buddy Fuller, Mario Galento, the Medics, the Infernos, Louie Tillet, Butcher Vachon and assorted others through the 1960s, featured the NWA world tag team champions of the mid-1960s, featured the signature program of an announcer MATWATCH named the best-ever on its all-time, all-star announce team last July, Ed Capral. A later NBC star, Tom Snyder, was booth announcer for LIVE ATLANTA in the early '60s. Until 1972, the program originated from the studios of Atlanta's Channel 11.

When Ted Turner spirited away GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP for his fledgling WTCG independent, it became the first program to ever draw more than 100,000 homes on the eventual SuperStation. Through the 1970s to the end of the '80s, largely with Gordon Solie as host, GCW---later rechristened WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING---was the trademark studio wrestling show, bringing a sense of intimacy with the viewer and giving birth to wrestling legends, such as Mr. Wrestling II, Buddy Colt, Ole Anderson and Austin Idol in the '70s and the younger-line Freebirds, Tommy Rich, Tony Atlas, Buzz and Brett Sawyer, Roddy Piper and the Road Warriors in the '80s.

But the 1984 WWF explosion into TV coliseum shows left studio presentations looking archaic. When Turner bought the NWA in late 1988, he

nudged WCW executives into an arena show. After plans to build an 800-seat arena inside Turner's CNN Center complex proved too costly, WCW found a new home at the 750-seat Center Stage Theatre in downtown Atlanta, giving an arena look with the intimacy of a nightclub.

April 8 marked the premiere date at Center Stage for satellite television's longest-running series of any kind and ended a tradition cable viewers had stored of studio wrestling from Turner for 17 years.



"THE BOBBY HEENAN SHOW": TITAN'S BIGGEST BOMB

In the annals of television history, there was TURN-ON, a 1969 ABC bomb which lasted all of one week. Well, not that long when you consider more than 20 affiliates pulled out of the show at the first commercial break. The general manager of the Cleveland affiliate told the network: "If your boys have to write dirty words on the walls, please don't use our walls."

There was a little ditty called YOU'RE IN THE PICTURE on CBS in 1961. A game show where celebrities stuck their heads through cutout holes of carnival cardboard pictures. Jackie Gleason, as host, figured if Groucho Marx could do one of these things for 13 years, why couldn't he? The second week, Gleason spent the entire half-hour making amends for the fiasco, telling the audience: "I apologize for insulting your intelligence."

THE BOBBY HEENAN SHOW was neither dirty, nor did it possess a megastar encee. It was just---in a word---bad. In this attempted spinoff of PRIME TIME WRESTLING, Titan Sports appeared to be doing an adaptation of its old TNT without a live audience. Or perhaps THE GONG SHOW with no good talent. Or the old TOMORROW show with Heenan as a poor man's Tom Snyder.

Whatever the format, THE BOBBY HEENAN SHOW on USA Cable laid perhaps the biggest egg of any first-run program in cable history. Designed to capitalize on Heenan's wry comic offerings on PRIME TIME, the premiere drew a strong 3.1 rating and 5.4 share but the second week, HEENAN had squandered 47% of PTW's audience in its 10:30-11 p.m. Monday slot. After the third show, USA canceled the program, which ended with Roddy Piper destroying the HEENAN set and taking over the studio for a revised split-screen role as comic analyst the next week on PTW, which reverted to a two-hour format.

Could HEENAN have been saved? Other than with some quality, the fault was not with the host himself. For one thing, every guest was a caricature of a caricature (a mother-daughter striptease combo, a nerd who rides the New York subway, 350-pound female models dubbed the "Oinkettes," i.e.) and there was no change of pace, other than their occupations. Second, a live audience may have helped, though they probably wouldn't have laughed often. But the real fault lies with Titan casting Heenan in the "star" role for the entire half-hour and it's the same problem Don Knotts had when he tried hosting an NBC variety hour in 1970. Knotts was great as Barney Fife when he could be the comic foil for Andy Griffith but the chemistry just wasn't there when Knotts was had carry sketches, week after week, in an attempt to get himself "over," as opposed to subtle way Andy to get Barney over as a supporting performer.

Heenan works on PRIME TIME because he's in and out in short, three-minute snippets and Gorilla Monsoon provides a much-underrated straight man cue for Heenan's humor. But here, Heenan faced off with a hapless cast of losers for an entire 30 minutes and after the first segment, viewers saw HEENAN for what it was, a one-joke show of Bobby insulting the world and it wasn't very funny because the guests were such unfortunate souls, they merely sat and took it.

TOP TV STORIES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

DAVID WOODS, CWF GO OUT OF BUSINESS

After a hot 1988, buoyed by the booking talents of Eddie Gilbert, the Continental Wrestling Federation deteriorated into a sea of tired talent and not even a short, creative stint by Bill Dundee could save the promotion.

Owner David Woods pulled the plug on CWF in late November but still at stake at this writing in valuable television time in nine key markets.

"PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK" ENDS

An innovative three years of wrestling as newsmagazine ended in April with the cancellation of PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK, which was syndicated to 26 cities.

Declining clearances and quality time periods and fewer independent promotions from which to draw clips spelled the end of PWTW. Its creator and original host, Joe Pedicino, left the series for the NWA in February but the show left its legacy as a creative program from outside the realm of the traditional match/interview format.

JERRY JARRETT DUMPS "WORLD CLASS" LABEL FOR USWA

Strictly a cosmetic move to change an old image, the TV angle of Eric Embry defeating P.Y. Chu'i to wrest control of World Class Championship Wrestling from a board of directors "headed" by Tojo Yamamoto, symbolized the end of a TV era which saw the former Fritz Von Erich-owned WCCW become the first promotion to market its series in national syndication since the old IWA of Eddie Einhorn in 1974.

MAGNUM T.A. FIRED AS NWA COLOR COMMENTATOR

In a move labeled cruel by many longtime fans and a professional necessity by insiders, Magnum T.A. was fired by Turner Broadcasting as an NWA color commentator.

Magnum had been teamed with Jim Ross in the January reorganization of TBS announcers and co-hosted CHI-TOWN RUMBLE on pay-per-view in February.

But Magnum's lack of broadcasting polish became painfully evident and he was dumped in favor of Michael Hayes. TBS honored terms of Magnum's \$75,000-a-year contract.

GENE OKERLUND'S SUMMER SLAM BOOKER

The Mean One offered one of the two most memorable bloopers of 1989 and it wasn't even live.

During SUMMER SLAM '89, Tony Schiavone led into a pre-taped interview segment with Okerlund. As Gene began the spot, the SUMMER SLAM logo banner fell behind him.

Technicians had cued the wrong cut on the tape and Okerlund blurted out the "f" word in frustration. Titan Sports officials later acknowledged the goof after originally claiming the foulup was intentional in an attempt at humor.

NWA CREATES THIRD WEEKLY SERIES: "POWER HOUR"

In what has predominantly been the best-edited NWA series to date, TBS added a third weekly wrestling series in June, the NWA POWER HOUR, with Jim Ross and Jim Cornette.

Originally, in addition to its three-bout cards, POWER HOUR contained a weekly NWA TOP 10, FUNK'S

GRILL---a comic segment with the former NWA world champion, and WRESTLING NEWS NETWORK, a newsfeature segment which marked the return of Gordon Solie to TBS and including Solie offering headlines of other promotions, including the WWF.

However, the Ric Flair booking regime eliminated the TOP 10 list and removed news of other groups from WNN. GRILL switched to the NWA syndicated package in January 1990 in favor of a Michael Hayes-hosted FREEBIRDS FOLLIES.

THE HOMECOMING: DUSTY'S FLA. FOLLIES

In an effort to build a non-regional image for his fledgling Florida promotion, Dusty Rhodes, fired as NWA booker in December 1988, rechristened the Sunshine State group the Professional Wrestling Federation.

THE HOMECOMING was Rhodes' attempt at a "supercard" (carried live by St. Petersburg's WTOG) and to anoint himself as PWF champion in a disastrous match vs. Steelman (Fred Ottman).

Rhodes even imported Dick Clark as guest emotional announcer. But the PWF effort never clicked and Rhodes left the group for the WWF in summer.

PIPER RETURNS TO WWF AS PTW CO-HOST

After a two-year absence from pro wrestling and a tepid movie career after his debut in "They Live," Roddy Piper signed as co-host of the WWF's PRIME TIME WRESTLING on USA Cable in August.

Piper, focus of a brief bidding war between TBS and Titan Sports, was thought twice to be headed to Turner but Piper's agent, David Wolff, negotiated the return.

In a one-shot for a reported \$50,000, Piper hosted a live PIPER'S PIT at WRESTLEMANIA V, an 18-minute creative bomb with Morton Downey Jr. which saw Piper spray Mort with fire extinguisher foam at the climax.

PORTLAND TV WRESTLING RESURGES

A small promotion can run just so many Rip Oliver angles and Don Owen's Portland Wrestling, seen on just one TV station, was hardly the likeliest place for a revival in 1989.

But with Roddy Piper closet booking the group (and Grappler Len Denton carrying out programs as the titled booker), Portland TV became the most spectacular angle-filled series in the U.S. during the first half of 1989.

Piper made guest appearances, including a memorable WWF-style segment, where he transformed young Art Barr into Beetlejuice, along with a popular brawl involving himself, Nord the Barbarian and the Grappler. Many shows were tailored to the talents of rising young heel Scotty the Body (Levy), who proved a comic foil to improved announcer Don Coss. Owen never expanded his station lineup but his weekly hour became a popular item with tape traders.

AWA TEAM CHALLENGE GOES AFTER CRASH TV

Plagued with a stripped talent roster and declining syndicated and ESPN ratings, the AWA and syndicator Bob Syres created a "Team Challenge" format to attract a new audience.

The team series, featuring Baron Von Raschke, Larry Zbyszko and Sgt. Slaughter as team captains, involved a complicated format and point system. Syres offered a cash-incentive plan for stations to carry the show and promised home video tapes.

But the syndie market did not jump at the show and its tapings in a crowdless studio offered terrible production values. Coupled with the failure of CRASH TV series such as AMERICAN GLADIATORS and ROLLERGAMES to capture instant large audiences, AWA TEAM CHALLENGE was not considered a success and the promotion's almost floating, almost non-existent fall time periods kept any team events from airing on ESPN.

SUPER CLASH III: KEEP THE PROMOTERS WELL APART

Verne Gagne's attempt to join forces with Jerry Jarrett and four other independent promoters for pay-per-view show Dec. 13, 1988, ended as did Gagne's previous joint venture, PRO WRESTLING U.S.A.: with promoters at war with each other.

The show, live from Chicago, primarily featured wrestlers from Gagne's AWA and Jarrett's World Class promotions, culminating with a well-received Jerry Lawler win over Kerry Von Erich to unite the two promotions' titles.

But the show only produced an 0.5% buy-rate and detonated into an explosion between Gagne and Jarrett and Financial News Network's SCORE service, which marketed the show to cable operators.

Gagne blew up at FNN/SCORE over not getting what he felt was his adequate share of the gross revenues. Jarrett was fuming at Gagne because he allegedly never got a share from Gagne for his participation and Jarrett and Gagne warred over Lawler's continuing to hold a "unified" AWA/World Class belt, which ultimately ended in the AWA "stripping" Lawler of the belt and Lawler blasting Gagne as a "senile old man" on Jarrett's TV shows.

"LEARNING THE ROPES":

A BAD LESSON

It started out as most 1980s sitcoms: a single parent, two precocious teenagers, a love interest for the father whose interest was usually unrequited and action revolving around a high school.

Except the parent (Lyle Alzado) was a teacher who just happened to be a moonlighting professional wrestler/jobber. Whose wrestling buddies always seemed to be playing cards in his kitchen. And whose kids were always helping guard the identity of The Masked Maniac.

Despite a performance by Alzado which showed promise for better-written roles, LEARNING THE ROPES, the first syndicated comedy series about pro wrestling, had about the same success as its 20% owner, Jim Crockett, had with his wrestling promotion in its final year.

Mired in BRADY BUNCHesque plots and with a few unbelievable storylines (Jimmy Garvin is injured by jobber Maniac and while in the hospital, decides to go to vet school at night to prepare for life after wrestling. How many wrestlers do you know who aren't wrestling at night, much less attending a demanding veterinary college?), ROPES quickly sank in 1989 after fair early ratings.

Even worse, Crockett's wrestlers who guested were often performers (Ricky Morton) already gone from the promotion, some to the WWF (Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson). Two episodes had no wrestling guests at all and one week the "special guest star" was Trent Knight.

Taped in Canada, ROPES explored recycled teenage stories which made wrestling incidental, at best. The two best outings included one episode in which Dick Murdoch, in true Texas fashion, was trying to lure a woman named Bonnie June, so he enlisted the Randall family's help. Murdoch showed a natural acting talent. The other was a storyline in which the Road Warriors went to the high school to urge students to work hard to become successful. Best line: (HAWK) "You people can be anything you want to be." (ANIMAL) "Some of you could be a king." (HAWK) "Some could be a queen." (ANIMAL) "Some could be a jack." (HAWK) "JACK???"

But more typical was a show in which Ricky Morton was in town with his rock band and after young Mark (Yannick Bisson) jammed with him, he decided to quit school and become a guitarist. But the night of Mark's debut on his own, he bombed. In a Wally-to-Ward Cleaver talk with his father, Mark said: "The magic just wasn't there without Ricky Morton." Lines like that just about summed up the fate of LEARNING THE ROPES.

W RESTLING
E ROADCASTING
S YSTEM

6:30 A.M.

(3) BLACKSTONES----Cartoon

Fred auditions for a new TV series, FRED BLACKSTONE'S NOSE and Wilma gets a gift of one coat of makeup, three inches thick. Voices....Fred: Joe Pedicino. Wilma: Boni Blackstone. Barney: Ronnie Garvin. Dino: Jim Cornette. Mr. Slate: Jim Herd. Bamm Bamm: Terry Gordy. Brontasaurus: Samuel Kent.

(9) SUPERMAN---Adventure

Clark (Hulk Hogan) almost has his identity exposed when he's hit with the Kryptonite-plex. Lois Lane: Liz Poffo. Super Zeus: Big Tiny Lister. Perry White: Dennis Brent. Jimmy Olsen: Lee Scott.

(20) SUPER MARIO BROTHERS SHOW----Children

Mario (Lou Albano) goes on the MORTON DOWNEY JR. SHOW and gets into a brawl with Dennis Coralluzzo and Larry Sharpe. Mort: Vince McMahon Jr.

7:00 A.M.

(3) TODAY----Gumbel/Norville

Deborah Norville is told if she doesn't use pineapple makeup above her eyes, she'll lose her job as co-host to Sherri Martel; Bryant leaks another memo, this time extolling everything wrong with the NWA; Verne Gagne subs for Willard Scott on the weather. (Live; 2 hrs.)

(9) GOOD MORNING AMERICA----Gibson/Lunden

Charlie Gibson reveals his long-lost brother Robert but refuses to become the third Rock & Roll Express member; Joan explores the world of culture with an interview with noted artist Mike Shaw. (Live; 2 hrs.)

(20) CBS THIS MORNING----Smith/Sullivan

Kathleen Sullivan is fired after admitting on the air her brother is a Gamesmaster. (Live; 2 hrs.)

9:00 A.M.

(3) PEOPLE'S COURT---Wapner

In "The Case of the Pompous Peanuthead," Theodore R. Long sues Norman, who tells Judge Wapner, "I didn't do it." In "The Case of the Empty Arena," AWA fans sue Verne Gagne for impersonating a wrestling promoter.

(9) DONAHUE----Discussion

An interview with First Lady Barbara Bush is abruptly interrupted when audience member Terry Funk rises to tell Mrs. Bush Ric Flair looks like her with anorexia. (60 min.)

(38) JOAN RIVERS----Discussion

Joan welcomes James N. Cornette, who tells Ms. Rivers she "looks like a genetic experiment gone bad." (60 min.)

9:30 A.M.

(3) LOVE CONNECTION----Game

Tojo Yamamoto tells host Chuck Woolery about his date with Toni Adams but Toni's husband Chris bashes up the set with Tojo's kendo stick.

10:00 A.M.

(3) FAMILY FEUD----Game

In a Loser-leave-the-Feud showdown, The Gilberts take on the Harts for a \$10,000 jackpot but host Ray Combs has a crisis when Eddie threatens to come back as The Midnight Rider if he loses.

(9) MR. WIZARD----Science

Mr. Wizard (Don Herbert) shows pictures from the flight of Voyager II, which brought back the first shots of the north side of Joe Pedicino's waistline.

(38) PERSONAL NOTE----Game

DEBUT: Gordon Solie emcees this new word game in which contestants see how many cliches they can speak in 30 seconds, if you please.

10:30 A.M.

(3) WHEEL OF FORTUNE----Game

Vanna White tells host Bob Goen she's lost a little baby bull named Leon and wonders why The Committee doesn't want him around.

(9) GALLOPING GOURMET----Cooking

Guest Joe Pedicino tells host Graham Kerr how he bankrupted the Sara Lee Bakery in Greenville, S.C.

(38) GERALDO----Discussion

Guest Jim Ross shows his idol his matching suspenders but a corny audience member tells Jim, "I'd like to see you smashed in the nose, too." (60 min.)

11:00 A.M.

(3) PRICE IS RIGHT----Game

Ted DiBiase attempts to bribe host Bob Barker when he loses in the Showcase Showdown. (60 min.)

(9) DANGER ZONE----Magazine

DEBUT: New series featuring tales of people who have teetered on the brink. In the opener, Paul E. Dangerously discusses how temperatures rise during hallway conversations with world championship bookers. Also, Kendall and Robert Windham discuss the dangers of spending \$20 bills.

11:30 A.M.

(9) SESAME STREET----Children

Theodore R. Long reads a story about the evolution of the peanut; Gary Hart tells kids what a guygene is; and Jim Crockett has a lesson on being a good loser.

(20) CAPTAIN KANGAROO----Children

Mr. Moose gives guest Paul E. Dangerously a lollipop and the Captain (Bob Keeshan) says, "Look everybody, see how Paul E. sucks."

12:00 NOON

(3) DIVORCE COURT----Drama

Judge Keene tries to help Randy and Liz settle their differences before their bald-headed friend Terry gets involved.

(9) ALL MY CHILDREN----Serial

Erica (Susan Lucci) has a new rival in town when Missy (Missy Hyatt) moves to Pine Valley; Nancy continues to suffer from amnesia and all she can remember are the words, "I am woman." (60 min.)

(20) DAYS OF OUR LIVES----Serial

Dr. Horton finally decides to leave Salem and retire to a farm, where he instantly discovers a red rooster; Ronald P. Gossett IV walks out of the hospital because he can't stand to be around a group of welfare recipients; Dr. Death (Steve Williams) is hired as a new staff physician. Rooster: Terry Taylor. (60 min.)

12:30 P.M.

(3) YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS----Serial

Rip Rogers tells Jill how empty his life is without Brenda Britton; Michael (Michael Hayes) tells Jack Abbott he's just like 7 UP: "Never had it...never will." (60 min.)

1:00 P.M.

(9) MOVIE----Crime Drama

"Doomed." (1989) Investigator Mike Hammer (Jim Ross) discovers who attacked Scott Steiner in a parking lot by reading their identities in the NWA WRESTLING WRAPUP. (2 hrs.)

(38) MOVIE----Comedy

"I Love Gilligan." (1990; Made-for-Wrestling) Veronica and Ginger get into a catfight over Gilligan (Scotty the Body) but the Skipper (Buddy Rose) has to break it up. (2 hrs.)

1:30 P.M.

(3) MOVIE----Comedy

"Shoot the Moon." (1989) Roddy (Tom Prichard) lifts his kilts just as Rick (Mark Spitz) is about to defeat an ultimate foe. (90 min.)

3:00 P.M.

(3) OPRAH WINFREY----Discussion

Dusty Rhodes tells Oprah about his new energy beverage, Ultra Blimp-Fast, and Jerry Blackwell discusses the secrets of sleeping until 4 p.m. every day. (60 min.)

(9) GREEN ACRES----Comedy

Oliver has another encounter with Mr. Haney (Bobby Heenan), who tries to sell him The Oinkettes.

(20) TWILIGHT ZONE---Science Fiction

Roddy transforms Art Barr into Beetlejuice but runs out of fire extinguisher foam when Martian invaders Nord and Grap move in for an attack.

3:30 P.M.

(9) MOVIE----Crime Drama

"Cannon: The Next Generation." (1990). Cannon (William Conrad) turns his detective agency over to his son Frank Jr. (Joe Picicino), who takes his first client out for a pizza with double cheese. (2 hrs.)

(20) GENERAL HOSPITAL----Serial

On the operating table, Verne tells Dr. X he's never forgiven him for not telling him he has Alzheimer's Disease. Dr. X tells Verne he's never forgiven him for having Greg. (60 min.)

4:00 P.M.

(3) PERRY MASON----Mystery

Perry defends a Texas ranch owner (Terry Funk) against a charge of attempting to murder a blond man who wears \$1,500 suits (Ric Flair). James Brown sings "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." Perry: Joe Picicino. (60 min.)

4:30 P.M.

(20) SANFORD AND SON----Comedy

The Four Horsemen turn on Sting, so Sting hires Fred (Redd Foxx) as his manager. Fred walks up to Ric Flair and calls him "dummy."

5:00 P.M.

(3) NWA PRO WRESTLING

In yet another announcer's change, Monty Hall teams with Trent Knight to call the action. (60 min.)

(20) WORLD WIDE WRESTLING

In still another announcer's shuffle, Bob Eubanks takes over as host with Bill Tush on color. (60 min.)

5:30 P.M.

(9) NWA MAIN EVENT

In an even further announcer's switch, Wink Martindale becomes the co-host with Buddy Colt.

6:00 P.M.

(3) EYEWITNESS NEWS

Reporter Crystal Glass begins her five-part series, "Americana," with a look at a plumber who sticks his hand up a toilet (Virgil Runnels). (60 min.)

(9) ACTION NEWS

Reporter Ida Claire begins her five-part series on "Identity Crises." Profiled tonight: a Georgia man named Ray Candy, who also thinks he's Kareem Muhammad, Blackstud Williams and Commando Ray. Ray: William Perry. (60 min.)

(20) NEWS CENTER 20

Dr. Red Duke discusses dental hygiene, showing Roddy Piper shoving Lavoris and dental floss in the mouth of Brother LUV. Brother: Bruce Prichard. (60 min.)

7:00 P.M.

(3) JEOPARDY!----Game

Tonight's final jeopardy answer: CAMERON, STONEY and LEX LUGER. (Correct question: What is a Kirk, a Burke and a jerk?).

(9) WWF WRESTLING

Doc (Steve Williams) jumps to the World Wrestling Federation and is given a match with Dusty Rhodes. Vince tells Doc and Dusty, "Fellows, have a good match tonight." But as Dusty walks away, Vince whispers to Doc, "But remember, he's not your boss any more." (60 min.)

(20) CURRENT AFFAIR----Newsmagazine

Host Maury Povich profiles Gorilla Monsoon, who tells viewers he keeps healthy by drinking HURRY UP, a new concoction of 7-Up and prune juice.

7:30 P.M.

(3) JOKER'S WILD----Game

Contestant Kevin Sullivan celebrates when he lands on 3 devils.

(20) INSIDE EDITION----Newsmagazine

Scheduled: a profile of Gary Hart, who reveals his health secret is a drink called THE ORIENT EXPRESS, a mix of soy sauce and prune juice.

8:00 P.M.

(3) HOGAN'S HEROES----Comedy

Col. Hogan (Terry Bollea) finally escapes Stalag 13 when his friend Brutus (Ed Leslie) breaks Col. Klink's monocle. Klink: Baron Von Raschke.

(9) HOGAN FAMILY----Comedy

David (Jason Bateman) has to protect Sandy (Sandy Duncan) from their visiting cousin Hulk (Terry Bollea) when he threatens to atomic drop her. But Vince (Frank Sutton) shows up to tell the other Hogans it's not real.

(20) BOOKER----Crime Drama

George and Ric continue to disappoint while Jack and Jim say they won't look for a cowboy. George: George Scott. Ric: John Schneider. (60 min.)

8:30 P.M.

(3) AMAZING STORIES----Anthology

Tonight: the amazing story of how Dino Bravo continues to get a push.

(9) MURPHY BROWN----Comedy

Murphy (Candice Bergen) tells her brothers Brickhouse and Bulldog Bob they can't come down to the newsroom, because they'll reveal her family secrets.

9:00 P.M.

(3) DICK CLARK PRESENTS----Variety

In an all-music show, Dick welcomes singers Virgil Runnels, Jim Ross, Eddie Gilbert, Missy Hyatt, David Crockett, Ric Flair, Gordon Solie, Jim Duggan, Andre Rousimoff, Tommy "Wildfire" Rich, Ted Turner and Vince McMahon Jr. (Live; 60 min.)

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

"Doo Doo Ron Ron".....Virgil
 "You Don't Mess Around with Jim".....Ross
 "Right Back Where We Started From," "Stop! In the Name of Love".....Eddie, Missy
 "You Like Me, Don't You?".....David
 "Yesterday Once More".....Ric
 "Help Me Make It Through the Night".....Gordon
 "If I Were a Carpenter".....Duggan
 "Tears of a Clown".....Andre
 "It's Over".....Tommy
 "Bridge Over Troubled Water".....Ted
 "Send in the Clowns".....Vince

(9) AMERICA'S MOST WANTED

Host John Walsh profiles a battery case involving a man named Jake who insults Daytona Beach women and an impersonation case of The Dingdongs, two men who claim to be wrestlers.

(20) SCW TELETHON

Southern Championship wrestlers, only receiving a hamburger and a fried pie for compensation, attempt

to raise money for "Jerry's kids." Tommy Rich offers to bleed on a Ford Festiva for \$1,000 and Randall Brown reports from the Old National Highway. (2 hrs.)

9:30 P.M.

(9) COPS

Profiled: Ray Traylor, a former prison guard who loses his nightstick to a Big Ball of Cholesterol; and footage of the arrest of Andre Rousimoff, who bashes a photographer.

10:00 P.M.

(3) JAKE AND THE FATMAN----Crime Drama

Jake and Joe argue over who's going to sleep with the snake. Jake: Jake Roberts. (60 min.)

(9) WONDER YEARS----Comedy

Wayne (Jason Hervey) wonders why no one will ask him to be a ring announcer again. Kevin: Fred Savage. Lynrd: Michael Hayes.

10:30 P.M.

(9) BATMAN----Adventure

Bruce (Johnny Ace) and Dick (Shane Douglas) are called by Commissioner Gordon (Jim Herd) to rid Gotham City of Beautiful Bobby and Sweet Stan. The Caped Crusader reveals that Aunt Harriet is really Jim Cornette's mother. Alfred: Joe Blanchard. Frank Rizzo: Ray Stevens.

11:00 P.M.

(3) ARSENIO HALL----Variety

Arsenio wonders why no NWA wrestlers appear on his show. Teddy: Theodore R. Long. (60 min.)

(9) RIC FLAIR'S GOLDEN OLDIES----Wrestling Nostalgia

DEBUT: Ric Flair hosts and produces this series of bouts for the new WOO (Wrestling Only Oldies) Association, in which competitors are brought back to recreate feuds and angles popular from 1984-86. In the opener, Buzz Tyler takes on Ron Bass, Buzz Sawyer goes against Tommy Rich, the Rock & Roll Express face the Midnight Express and Ole & Arn Anderson meet Thunderbolt Patterson & Manny Fernandez. Next week: a WOO extra as the Anderson Brothers face the Statler Brothers in a Flowers-on-the-Wall Match. (60 min.)

(20) AMOS & ANDY----Comedy

Kingfish (Dusty Rhodes) has to bail Sapphire out of a

jam after she slaps a witch and a macho king attacks her. Endora: Sherri Martel.

11:30 P.M.

(20) JOHNNY CARSON---Variety
Johnny welcomes Lex Luger, who discusses his new book, "I Can't Wait 'til Tomorrow, 'Cause I Get More Obnoxious Every Day;" Cactus Jack Manson, who sings, "All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth;" The Four Horsemen, who sing "Moments to Remember;" and Lance Russell, who discusses how he was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, one time. (60 min.)

12 MIDNIGHT

(3) NIGHTLINE---Ted Koppel
Ted discusses the subject of inertia. Interviewed by satellite from Atlanta is the NWA Booking Committee and from Connecticut, Hillbilly Jim.

(9) SALLY JESSY RAPHAEL---Discussion
Sally welcomes Butch Miller and Luke Williams, who reveal that constipation is the reason they walk the way they do. (60 min.)

12:30 A.M.

(3) 20 QUICK WAYS TO A MILLION---Commercial
Blackjack Mulligan and Kendall Windham host this look at how to stretch your dollar.

(20) 60 MINUTES---Newsmagazine
Norman admits it takes him an hour and a half to watch this show. (60 min.???)

1:00 A.M.

(3) BEAUTY & THE BEAST---Fantasy
In a macabre turn, B&B decide to use hedgeclippers to break Boy George's wife's arm. George: Adrian Street. Wife: Linda Street. (60 min.)

(9) COLUMBO---Crime Drama
Columbo (Peter Falk) questions Marc (Marc Lowrance) concerning an attack on Chris Adams. Marc tells Columbo, "He was hit by a Coke bottle in the head. HE---MAY---BE---DEAD!!!" (90 min.)

1:30 A.M.

(20) MEDICAL STORY---Drama
Dr. Charles Platt tells his patient (Downtown Bruno)

he reminds him of a 24-hour stomach virus that has extended to 48. (60 min.)

2:00 A.M.

(3) SERMONETTE---Prichard
Brother LUV recites the poem, "God made the rivers, God made the lakes, God made mosquitoes....everyone makes mistakes. After the sermon, your announcer offers the address for a home supply of Alberto VC Lard which Bro. uses on his hair.

2:30 A.M.

(9) RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT
This week: the WWF makes Tim Dix an offer as an announcer after Vince McMahon hears the NWA is interested in him. (60 min.)

(20) MEDICAL CENTER---Drama
Dr. Gannon (Chad Everett) tells a group of executives Mean Mark Callous has a ruptured disc and can't compete until January 1991. The executives want to know why Vince McMahon was in the room with Dr. Gannon when Mark was told of his condition. (60 min.)

3:30 A.M.

(3) I LOVE LUCY---Comedy
Lucy (Sherri Martel) is upset because Ricky (Ricky Santana) and Fred (Bob Geigel) want to go to the matches instead of playing cards with her and Ethel.

(9) CBS NEWS NIGHTWATCH
Charlie Rose interviews Supreme Court justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who tells how the high court has as many members as the NWA booking committee. (2 hrs.)

(20) FISHIN' WITH ORLANDO WILSON
Orlando's boat is tipped over by a group of NWA wrestlers who are angry at the weak lead-in ratings he gives WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING.

4:00 A.M.

(3) GILLETTE CAVALCADE OF SPORTS
Eddy Mansfield demonstrates how to use the sponsor's product without a razor.

(Wrestlers reserve the right to change organizations without prior notice to their television stations.)

GRAPPLING THE FUTURE: THE 1990S

Fellow wrestling newsletter editor J.D. McKay, Jr., he of the RINGSIDE REFLECTOR, commented on his MATWATCH awards ballot, "As for the '90s, who can predict it?" As for J.D., he's right. Considering how much the wrestling industry has changed in the last two years alone, forecasting the end of the decade is incredibly dangerous. However, I looked back at what we predicted for 1989 in last year's annual and find our batting average wasn't terribly poor.

We predicted ratings in the 8 range for the WWF syndicated shows and the 5-6 level for the NWA and those are on target, the WWF averaging about an 8.2 and the NWA a 5.4 for the year. We predicted a slight ratings rebound on TBS for the NWA shows and after a disastrous first half of the year, things have rebounded in the 3-3.5 range for WCW, as we forecast.

We were right on the following prognostications: 1) a so-so rating for the NBC prime time special (actually, it was in the lower third of the Nielsens); 2) a fresh promotional name for World Class and an end to CWA; 3) cancellation for PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK; 4) continued decline in the numbers of wrestling hours per week on most TV markets; 5) Jerry Blackwell losing Southern Championship (though he regained it in mid-December); 6) Dusty Rhodes not being able to make a go of PWF; 7) Bill Watts would not return to wrestling; 8) too much Robert Fuller and Jimmy Golden would jeopardize CWF.

Our miscues: 1) Don Owen and Verne Gagne would fold (Owen revived and Gagne amazingly hung in); 2) Japan stars would appear more frequently in the NWA (only Genichiro Tenryu did and just for a poor one-shot); 3) Atlantic Coast would be the new indie promotion to watch (it lasted 12 weeks); 4) Dusty would start his own group if PWF failed (PWF actually was semi-his own group but none of us would have ever believed his departure for Titan); 5) the WWF would try to make an offer for Sid Vicious (the NWA got him but speculation runs rampant at this writing that his injury-enforced idleness will last only until his NWA pact runs out and he can join Titan); 6) a Don Muraco title reign would bomb in the AWA (he never had one).

In looking on the next pages into what the future may bring, it's hard not to feel that we may be in the final days (and I hate to sound like someone who just watched an episode of THE 700 CLUB) of pro wrestling in general. How much impact the promotional admissions of predetermined outcomes will have long-term on the business is yet to be measured. I can't help but feel at this stage that the analysis of a good announcer friend of mine may be correct that, "It's over. Even though Vince is still making plenty of money, he's coasting on inertia. This business has hot-shotted the fans so much in the last five years that not even the big-time promotions can do much more to top themselves and the fans are worn out." That may be a highly generalized, even pessimistic view. But it's much like teams who win the Super Bowl (the San Francisco 49ers aside). Once they've had the taste of the top, it often takes a wholesale team turnover before they can retaste it because you can rarely top yourself from a mountaintop experience. But let's go to the mountaintop and see what the fearless forecaster feels the 1990s will bring.

PROMOTIONS

WWF: Vince McMahon can coast this entire year and probably the next two and not worry about being touched financially or promotionally in this field, if Hulk Hogan remains active. As of this writing, major rumors are spreading of an impending Hogan retirement. I doubt it. The Hogan mystique, which has outlived anything popular culture analysts would have ever predicted, would not survive as well were he to simply settle back to do children's entertainment programs and he's not talented enough as an actor to sustain any kind of movie that Titan Sports doesn't produce. I believe Hogan will probably hang it up by 1993 because he'll then be 40 and could afford to just come back for four to six guest appearances a year and be the best-loved elder statesman in the history of the business. I'm told he's invested well and could walk away today and never worry about cash for the rest of his life.

At some point, if McMahon does not steal Sting, who is contracted with Turner through 1992, he'll give The Ultimate Warrior a run on top. Unless a new character is created or unless Sid Vicious could be marketed into a new monster that could sweep the country (the name would have to change to sell him positively to kids), Warrior has to be the heir apparent. Randy Savage could not be as effective in the top spot today and no one in the existing pack is the kind who could carry the promotion.

In the immediate future, I see The Skyscrapers entering the WWF this summer but not necessarily as a tag team. With the current booking panel in effect, Danny Spivey and Vicious will never be used as anything more than, at best, stalemates with the Road Warriors and Sid should have long since been made the monster single. And I predict McMahon will make major stars out of both. They will be the major acquisitions unless circumstances create others. But if the NWA doesn't get off the pot, I could see Titan taking Scotty the Body and making a comic manager out of him. Paul E. Dangerously's entry into the WWF largely would depend on who McMahon would pair him with. He'll reject any bids to manage people like Dino Bravo and John Tenta but if they were to stick him with Curt Hennig, he may show up.

Vince will continue to do profitable, if only so-so numbers on most pay-per-views, usually in the 2-3% range for SUMMER SLAM and SURVIVOR SERIES and under 2 for ROYAL RUMBLE and whatever the fifth show is. WRESTLEMANIA, if headed by Hogan-Warrior, will probably do a 6-7% because I see more money in that than in a Hogan-Savage where everyone knew Hogan would regain the title.

NWA: Outside of a healthy rise in TBS ratings, adequate pay-per-view revenues and a few quality talent additions (Brian Pillman, Mick "Cactus Jack" Foley, Scott Steiner and the reacquisition of Arn Anderson), this group, sad to say, is in poorer shape to dive into the 1990s than it was one year ago.

Countless instances of bickering, infighting, egocentrism and impatient decisions have left many hardcore fans who truly want this group to mount a serious challenge sorely disappointed.

A few short-term things we can predict: 1) the name NWA will cease to be used after the first quarter of this year---or at least by midyear. But calling the group WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING will not succeed in regaining lost fans unless a major revamping occurs (see WORLD CLASS to USWA, i.e.); 2) The Sting era of WCW will begin and the company will have to be patient because it will not get off to as successful a start as TBS will hope. Not because Sting isn't a marketable, capable performer to lead the group. But because the elements leading up to him becoming world champion are going to be rushed and focusing too much on the re-turn of Ric Flair and the reunion of the original Horsemen, an act (sorry, hardcores) that was dead before Tully

and Arn ever left for Titan. In reality, Lex Luger should win the belt Feb. 25 and then lose it to Sting later but the company is jumping a checker here; 3) as long as Flair and the current booking panel remain in force, the NWA will continue to look more and more like OLDIES '85. Richard Petty won't win the Daytona 500 again and Arnold Palmer will never put on the green coat of the Masters as a champion again. Accordingly, let's look at what the more troubled promotion should do, in our view:

***BOOKING: There needs to be ONE booker, not an active wrestler of any kind, and no more committees. If you want to know how committees can screw things up, spend a month on a college campus. There simply are too many heads, too much jockeying and too much vulnerability to decisions made in the heat of dispute. Jim Herd should make that decision no later than Feb. 26.

***ANNOUNCERS: Quit tampering with them and let the current crew have time to jell. Don't react at the fluctuation of a New York ratings point. It's like producer Hugh Wilson said about WKRP IN CINCINNATI: "CBS moved the show 18 times in four years. When your mother doesn't know what time the show is on, you're in trouble." People need time to get comfortable with the current roster. If you want to bring Missy Hyatt onto the TBS MAIN EVENT, fine. But settle on a lineup and leave it alone for at least six months.

***TALENT: The current setup is only good for nostalgia and simply making Sting or Luger world champion isn't changing that. It's like TV revival shows. Most of them are good for a one-shot to see how the years have changed the old gang but another series wouldn't work (do you think THE NEW LEAVE IT TO BEAVER measured up to the original?). I enjoyed RETURN TO MAYBERRY just to see Andy and Barney again but I'd rather see Andy play a lawyer weekly now than to see Sheriff Taylor and Deputy Fife become old men. Even THE PRICE IS RIGHT, when it returned in 1972, had a drastically revised format from its slow-moving version of the '50s and '60s.

This promotion was on the right track when it was developing new characters in the spring of '89 with Norman, the Skyscrapers, the Dynamic Dudes, Pillman, Great Muta and the younger Steiner. Muta's leaving for Japan is a great blow and one can only hope he can be reclaimed and turned into the babyface he should be.

Difficult as it is for the veteran NWA fan to accept, this group is going to have to go after kids and teens if it is to gain broad acceptance and the only way that can develop is to create new images and performers. Milton Berle doesn't sell in 1990. Roseanne Barr does.

PREDICTIONS: There are two major keys to this promotion in 1990 proper, much less the rest of the decade, and neither are wrestlers: Jack Petrik and Jim Herd. The two chieftains have to gain unquestioned and implicit control of the NWA---in discipline, making dates, and overall promotional direction. The naming of a sole booker is one key. But if this company does not want to bite the bullet and give Bill Watts a try, it should hire Watts as an overall administrative director (perhaps like NFL teams' director of player personnel) to handle day-to-day functions of the wrestling (with a separate booker) and allow Herd to concentrate on the merchandising, financial and marketing aspects of the NWA. The guess, however, is that this won't happen. But if a significant, upward trend at the arenas does not occur, TBS may consider getting out of the arena business completely by year's end.

A sole booker will be named from among the following: Jim Ross, Terry Funk or someone we haven't considered. Our belief is that Ric Flair will not accept the change and attempt to test the kind of offer he could get from the WWF. If he felt terms were acceptable, he may well attempt to challenge his contract, which expires in 1992. That could set off a major legal spiral.

If he did manage to leave, Arn Anderson would probably go with him. It would be our further prediction that such an occurrence may be best for Flair's and the NWA's long-term interests. Veteran Flair fans don't see it but that may be the dramatic change necessary for the Turner organization to make the major revamping necessary to chart a new course for the '90s.

Finally, Owen Hart will probably be re-offered a spot in the NWA and refuse it, the NWA will make a stab at getting Dan Kroffat and Doug Furnas away from Japan, particularly if the Skyscrapers do bolt and a change in bookers will probably give the NWA a shot at Big Van Vader, though stories are that strained relations with New Japan have jeopardized that. Clearly, this is a critical year for Petrik and Herd.

INDEPENDENTS

This is a depressing subject. There isn't a solitary independent in the country that has a genuine chance of major interest, including the USWA, though Jerry Jarrett's group can hang in there with its revenue from syndicated ratings. Aside from traditional fans, indies just appear to be like playing in a nightclub in Kansas City as opposed to appearing at Caesar's Palace. The small-town, small-promotion show may have gone the route of the TV variety show....fond days to remember, never to return.

Some predictions for the various groups:

USWA ---- Jarrett will focus all his attention in Dallas, now that Memphis has been virtually abandoned. The predominantly Memphis talent will not be able to revive broad-based interest in the group but as long as it can maintain an adequate syndication lineup, enough ad revenues will ensure its survival. But even if stations buy the USWA LIVE!!! package of live shows from Andrews Syndication, it will make little difference in the shows' ratings. Just don't expect major headlines from this group.

PWF ---- Gone. Even if they still tape TV shows.

SOUTHERN ---- Only the help of a Joe Pedicino or a Paul E. Dangerously could hold this group together another six months. The benediction is near.

ICW ---- As long as Dangerously is booking, this group will have hot TV and probably be the best-booked indie group in the country. But how long Paul E. will stay connected is anybody's guess.

PORTLAND ---- Owen can probably hang in the year with his crew and low costs of promoting but with Rip Oliver back, there are just so many angles you haven't done with him and this year, you don't have a Roddy Piper behind the scenes coming up with creative scenarios. This will pale compared to the hot first eight months of '89 for this group.

RED BASTAIN'S LUCHA LIBRE ---- The West Coast group was one of the most entertaining to watch of the last half of the year but Red just doesn't have the financing to keep up the TVs he ran. A few of the stars (Conan, in particular) merit shots at groups like the USWA or NWA.

AWA ---- As long as Verne Gagne maintains any connection at all with ESPN, even if it's at 2 in the morning, no matter how bad it gets, he'll be around. I've long since stopped forecasting the end of this promotion. It's like predicting how long George Steinbrenner will keep a manager.

During the year, few splinter groups (Heritage, the new George Scott group, NWF) may try to get a stab going but none of them can sustain enough ratings to hold TV time for long. Tor Berg's Ladies PWA effort, which is now on regional cable sports networks may be the only one which has a prayer of making a connection because it is offering something different and is trying to treat women's wrestling not as bizarre as GLOW or POWW, though it needs something with more pizzazz than Brad Rheingans' HOLD OF THE WEEK as segments.

Frankly, with the only exception of Jarrett's USWA, the observation "it's over" is more than appropo for independent promotions. Ultimately, what that means is younger stars trying for spots in the NWA and WWF will not have a chance to groom and polish before getting a big-time shot, which means you'll probably see poorer workers and less-talented interviewees to develop characters. That may mean more and more of a premium on quality managers, who have strong communication ability. And good ones are increasingly hard to find.

TV & PAY TV

The WWF can continue to get away with selling "stars" as opposed to "matchups" on most of its weekly TV because it is ingrained enough in the American mainstream that kids will continue to watch just to see the names. But the NWA will be forced to "give away" more on the tube to maintain the strong ratings TBS demands for its three weekly hours.

But the NWA is in a much more vulnerable spot for syndication. Titan is picking up a number of key markets in March from spots vacated by the canceled ROLLER GAMES and Turner Program Services has been much less aggressive in going after the added openings, though the latest lineup is up to 168 stations. Going into the February sweeps, the TBS shows have reverted into a lackluster, sluggish format with no real hooks for any targeted audience. In my view, the U.S. tag team tournament is not heavy enough to perk up the numbers. The entire format needs tinkering with fresh new segments and features and more "up close and personal" profiles of the wrestlers, such as the ones done on Ricky Steamboat last January and suddenly abandoned. The music videos of the spring have been all but junked. Other than new theme music and graphics, the NWA syndie shows look like nothing more than recycled versions of Jim Crockett NWA shows, only with post-production.

However, let's face it: wrestling is no longer an arena business---it is a TV business, particularly a pay-TV business. By the end of this year, pay-per-view may be available in 18 million homes and by 1995, that figure is expected to be close to 45 million. Promotions won't have to get high buy-rates to make big money from their supercards.

Just examine how the business has evolved in just five years: we've gone from the weekly arena show to the monthly arena show to the quarterly arena show, to---in some areas---the biennial arena show. Part of that was brought on by the multiple-promotion overexposure on cable and syndication. Some of it was brought on by markets with independents which "stripped" wrestling five nights a week. People saw enough acceptable ring action at home that they didn't care to pay 10 bucks a head every time the guys came to town. But the rest of it developed from the pay supercard which elevated viewers' expectations well above the level of the average house event. That, along with the knowledge that most key angles and belt changes are only going to occur today when the cameras are present, is pushing wrestling more toward the direction boxing moved in the mid-1960s. So many of boxing's quality matchups became available on TV that it killed the box office for local bouts.

In my view, the larger the pay universe becomes and the more of a drain travel costs create, the more wrestling will adopt a boxing posture. You'll

continue to see the weekly shows on cable and in syndication to draw national advertising, same as ESPN's TOP RANK BOXING and the weekly fight card on USA Cable. But Jack Petrik's idea, proposed late in 1988, of an eventual pay-per-view wrestling card of the month, perhaps for \$9.95 (which is certainly more profitable as the pay homes grow), with the one super show of a WRESTLEMANIA or STARRCADE variety for \$19-25 is a lot closer to reality than I believed at the time. I recall telling Petrik I didn't think there was enough creative diversity to make that many pay shows special. And I don't if a promotion is having to book 200-300 house shows a year, in addition to doing live specials and pay cards.

But if a group is strictly taping weekly TV, doing a bimonthly live cable special and giving up on the grueling schedule of town travel, I'm more inclined to believe it can---and eventually will be done. I can easily see a day now when TBS might run The Omni, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, Greensboro and Charlotte on a rotating basis every 4-6 weeks, tape TV twice a week and forget the cities which are hopeless drains on drawing huge crowds. Titan is basically a 4-day-a-week business in the arenas, except on TV week and I could envision that gradually declining in the next few years.

With McMahon booking so many "one match" supercards today, where the supporting bouts have marginal meaning, he's already formatted in the same fashion as boxing's big shows.

But, make no mistake, wrestling is a television business and will be even more so in the 1990s. Arenas are strictly an ancillary part of the total operation. And by the end of the decade, when a piece of the NFL schedule, perhaps part of the baseball playoffs, portions of the Olympics and possibly even a national championship game for college football go to pay-per-view...as they will...you'll read how wrestling was the pioneer of it all, just as it was when it had its premiere on broadcast TV in 1941 and spearheaded the satellite revolution on Ted Turner's WTCC superstation in 1975 and paved the way for the explosion of cable networks in the early 1980s through its top ratings.

The only question is whether big-time promotions have, as my friend indicated, "hot-shotted" their public to the point that an eventual fade comes which dissolves the explosion of the mid-1980s. And if the NWA fails to rebound, would viewers begin to eventually weary of the WWF as the only significant game in town with no genuine lesser group over which it towers? Much depends on the fickleness and attention span of kids and teens, the WWF's core audience, and Titan's abilities to develop enough new characters and inventive confrontations to rekindle its loyalties every three years.

No matter what, we'll try to be here to see it as it happens.

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Other shots came from Dennis Brent, the Perry White of professional wrestling. Dennis now edits the NWA WRESTLING WRAPUP but many of the action shots during the WRESTLE WAR '89 and BASH matches of Terry Funk and Ric Flair are courtesy of Dennis' former publication, PRO WRESTLING DIGEST. Dennis offers his shots for sale and they are excellent. For prices and availability, write to Dennis at P.O. Box 796488, Dallas TX 75248.

If you're interested in any cartoons from Bill Kunkel, write him at his publication, ANGLE, 330 S. Decatur, Las Vegas NV 89107. If you'd like to order extra copies of the caricatures of Luger, Muta and Sting by Jim Connaroe, write him at 800 Second Avenue, Opelika AL 36830. For a price you and he agree on, Jim may agree to do a drawing of your request, if you supply the photograph.

Most of all, we thank you, as Bartles and Jaymes would say, for your support. Our work has truly been a pleasure because so many of you, be it through complimentary calls or letters or disagreement with our views or simply renewing your subscriptions have given us so much valuable encouragement. Hopefully, the 1991 MATWATCH ANNUAL, Lord willing that I can do another one, now that I nearly dropped from exhaustion over this one, will challenge us creatively as much as this one. Until we meet again, whatever you do....do it right!